



D'Artagnan's
Exploit
ALEXANDRE DUMAS

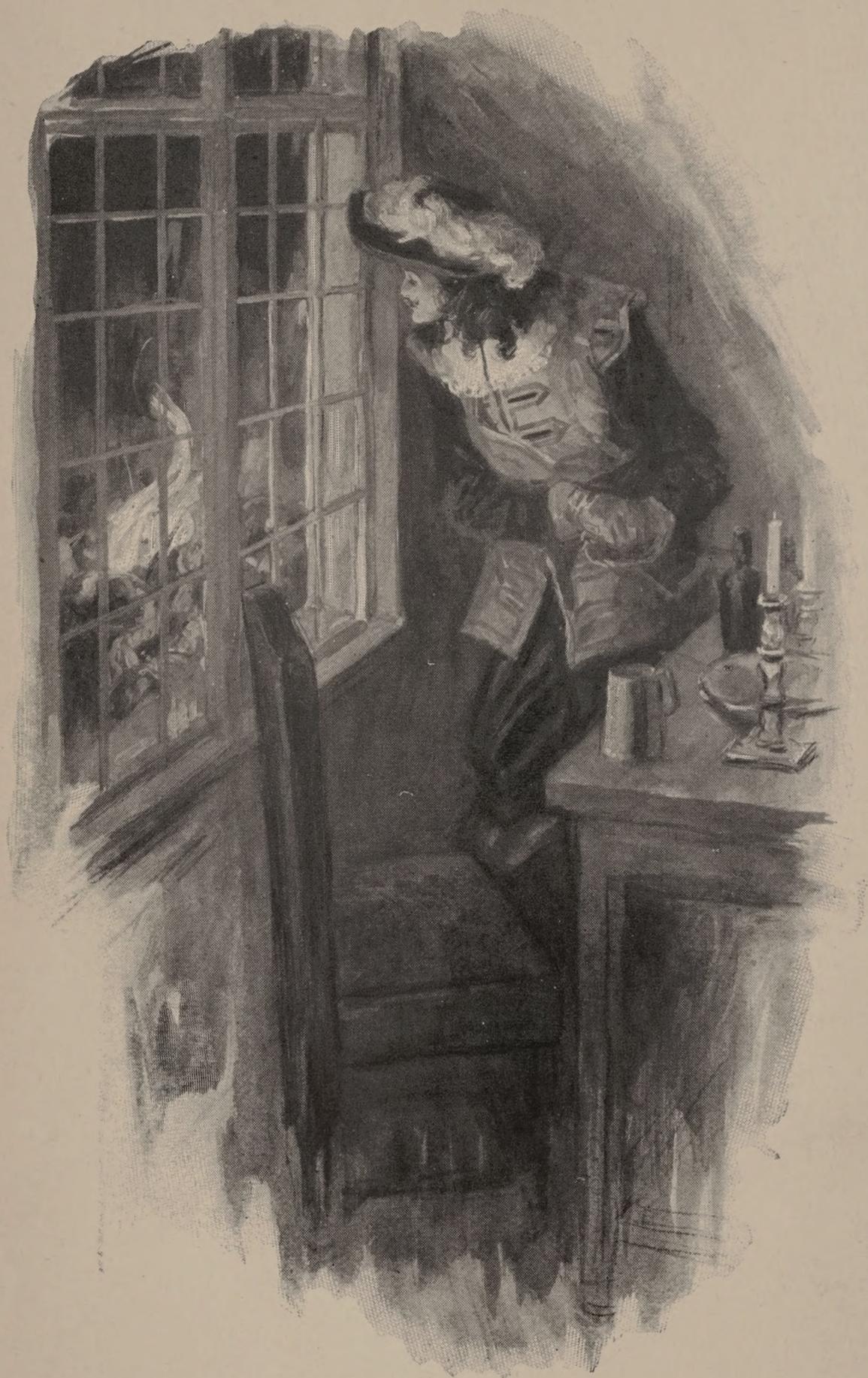


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"They now set a torch flaming. By this fitful light, the young soldier could enumerate the principal figures."

(See page 32)

D'Artagnan's Exploit

(“LOUIS TREIZE”)

BY

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

AUTHOR OF

“D'ARTAGNAN, THE KING MAKER,” “ALL FOR A CROWN,” “THE REGAL BOX,”
“THE KING'S GALLANT,” “THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO,”
“THE QUEEN'S NECKLACE,” ETC., ETC.

Translated and adapted from Alexandre Dumas' Work,
“Louis XIII. et Richelieu,” by HENRY L. WILLIAMS



NEW YORK AND LONDON
STREET & SMITH, PUBLISHERS

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 P R E F A C E 

The France of the first quarter of the seventeenth century was clouded by the shade of the severe civil wars, and the mass sighed for peace at any cost. It was the man's era—women were not prominent in politics and, unlike the *grande mademoiselles* of a later time, did not push themselves forward among clashing swords and before the cannon mouth. In fact, except in town, there was no society possible. The high roads were few, tortuous and ill-kept. The main roads diverged to allow some nobleman to have his castle stand in the way. Bandits, unjust tax collectors and wild animals haunted the groves, and the peasants went armed against them, encouraged by the preservers of game. The web is a tangle of injustice, privileges, caste, bribable magistrates, police used for private wrongs; a chaos of oppression, anarchy and spoliation. Royalty was like the bloated spider of a hundred arms, basking in the sunshine, but having its golden thread stolen for others' gain. Rebellion was organized for selfish ends, and to satisfy petty feuds; and while there was little justice, there were uncounted justices.

Since the assassination of King Henry the Fourth of France (1610), the statesmen who misgoverned his country had allowed France to wallow in the blood and mire for thirty years. In this dreariness came Cardinal Richelieu into his reign—reign, not rule, for he was above the nominal administrator, King Louis XIII. (1601-1643)—to make it the shining keystone of the European empires.

This story must needs be enthralling when its action is interwoven with the superlative events of this epoch. The proud peerage was to be abased, the quarrelsome sects reduced and pacified, the political parties curbed, and the rapacious house of Austria made to cower.

“D’Artagnan’s Exploit,” being in Dumas’ happiest, lucid vein, makes clear how Richelieu cropped the nobles like flaunting poppies when they made head against his policy as a leveler, that the royalty might be elevated supreme. This vigorous and invigorating work reveals the captivating muscles of a most merciless plot. Its object, the cardinal minister, baffles its leader, Count Chalais, though he was leagued with the court, the young and the old queens, and even the king, who sometimes sought to rid himself of his “Old Man of the *See*.”

Here we have Alexandre Dumas show himself the story teller pre-eminent. With what grace and prodigality, like another Prospero, he evokes the grand, guileful, exuberant spirits of that admirable past! This is Cardinal Richelieu, the militant—in full ardor of action and copious energy—in canonicals and also in war armor, proving that the sword in competent hands is powerful as the pen.

The archives are moldering and the ink faded whence Dumas drew his foundation; but he does not pause in the study, but presses upon the field, where he displays the man—as plainly on the street as the throne, in the thicket as the palace.

But a chief, though a prodigious genius, cannot alone carry out his colossal conceptions; nothing better attests surpassing merit than its choice of aids. To have his gigantic missions suitably performed he seeks a lieutenant, and finds him in Louis D’Artagnan. D’Artagnan, gay and gallant, caustic and cavalier, not always fortunate, but never downcast; thinking with swiftness and striking with directness, the foremost of the beloved heroes who exact affection. For they are, everyone in Dumas, inspired with honest fellow feeling. The Gascon has the patience and the skill to undo knots, but it saves so much time to—“Out, good blade! and cut them!”

This is at the outset of D’Artagnan’s consistent career: Richelieu had seen his promise at the La Rochelle siege (1627), and appointed him officer in the Elite Royal Musketeers’ Regiment. As these pages illustrate, D’Artagnan served him gratefully as well as intelligently. By this capable instrument, the great governor crushes the

terrible plot, charging D'Artagnan with the chase, capture and guard of the prime rebel—the crowning exploit.

Dumas is fond of Cardinal Richelieu. Imagine a Shakespeare purely a politician—it is Richelieu, in Dumas' eyes. Contradictory and clashing passions amalgamate in him to make a perfect genius. In his fecund career (1624-1642), a crammed twenty years, Richelieu squandered genius, talents, the country's treasures, her men, her resources, to maintain a power more arduously retained than shrewdly obtained. Cunning yet audacious, vindictive as a woman or a churchman, yet clement, sarcastic, but merry in his scant idle hours, susceptible yet steeled, he could stoop to persuade the obdurate, but would trample on the innocent. A soldier's son, he wore the prelate's robe with dignity. He grasped wealth but to advance his followers more than his family; he blended his steps with the commonweal's so that both rose together. He might have been the most infamous of voluptuaries, but—as witness the France he left glorious at his death!—his spirit was harnessed to restless labor.

And yet this zealous minister was not upheld by his king; never was a favorite so neglected by his master.

This master (?), Louis XIII.—a puppet with water, and not even honest brawn inside—vaguely felt that Richelieu was his motor. He spun around on the state machine like the “governor,” but, like that, was far from the power that whirled the wheels and drove the rod. Feeble, treacherous, fixed in his few resolves by inertia, he was that wayward hound rambling off to “try a new master,” but always returning to the old home.

The chameleon premier and the phantom monarch were surrounded by a court inimical—turbulent, greedy, old plotters and their young dupes. For a king impassioned for the chase, female beauties and conversational charms were as smoke. So the parasites are amiable rather than amorous, and more versed in midnight cabals than love trysts. They wore swords by right, but they used the dagger and the poison bowl by liking. The leading spirit was logically the king's dissolute brother, Gascon, envying—hating his senior, and dreaming of some one bolder

stealing the crown for him—the supple, submining, shallow Duke of Orleans.

In those times, people only cared to live—they grieved often, laughed but little, and stepped aside when the car of state or the private chariot rolled their way; now we wish to live long, laugh a good deal and grieve not at all! We wish to learn without tedium. So, Dumas in this, as in his other works, convenes with our taste. He does not require inconvenient reading up; he excludes the dust on the wheels of great events. His bundle of data bristles with attractions only; his comparisons are broad and his explanations terse and startling. He knows that those memoirs which ordinary novelists employ are but what the writers wished to mask in; he has a passion for mystery and does not stint it—but he elucidates. His ghost is something tangible within the transparent shroud. When he goes into the unlit aisles, under the cobwebbed vaults, into deep-set closets, it is to wake slumbering echoes, to repeat love secrets, mighty schemes, brave deeds, and fiery speeches audible through his megaphone. Where history was mute, he finds the voice—where it was a blank, he brings out the sunk-in tear, the underlying signature, the blood spot which denounces the guilty; where the contemporary saw glitter, he points to crime!

Usually you recall the principal stalking horses of historical tales as so many starched togas or inflated bombast, helmets hollow as in “Otranto,” but Dumas’ characters come as figures animating council boards, throne rooms, battlefields, clandestine crypts; real swords flash in knitted fists, and you see the sparks fly!

The perusal of “D’Artagnan’s Exploit” will affirm the London *Times*’ criticism of our author: “Dumas was almost the only French novelist of eminence who wrote as if he had no end in view beyond the telling of an interesting, moving and amusing story.”

H. L. W.

D'ARTAGNAN'S EXPLOIT.

CHAPTER I.

THE HOUSE WITH NO ODOR OF SANCTITY.

History is depicted with a torch in her hand. She usually holds this light so high up that the rays strike only on the high points. Plains and vales are lost in the twilight and the darkness; still more surely the precipices escape.

Now what epoch in French history is so full of precipices as King Louis XIII.'s reign—or, as we ought to say, the reign of Armand Duplessis, cardinal-duke, and, decidedly, the first man in France?

Let us, then, light our lantern by history's torch and go down into the deepest abysses, if we must.

* * * * *

It was the third decade of 1600. At a time approaching the middle of the forenoon, a passenger paused on the place before St. Germain's Church by the Louvre Palace, in Paris, and looked over the way up at the somber front of the edifice commenced by King Philip Augustus two hundred years before. Restored by Francis I., and en-

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larged by Charles IX. and Henry IV., it still bore resemblance to a castle. Still might the stout walls, the buttressed gateways and the conical, leaded towers turn off bullets from the still clumsy firearms in vogue.

In daylight the wanderer would have had his sight enlivened by the uniforms of the palace guards; they still had such "hackbushes," or arquebuses, as were used in the late civil wars—religious, by the way. Swiss guards had superseded the Scotch archers, French guards for the king or queen, and some gentlemen of the privy body-guard.

But the butterflies retired at dark, and out came the nighthawks—the palace nightwatch, halberdiers, swordsmen, pikemen.

On seeing the lonely rover stop and stare, like a rustic come to see the sights, several belated citizens, with undying Parisian courtesy to show their town, paused; but on seeing that he was wearing the cowl and robe of the Capuchins, who had a convent in St. Honoré Street, went on. They had no fears for him, if a stranger. This garb enjoyed immunity in the dangerous ways, for Paris was dangerous—still mediæval, without reliable watch, lights or vehicles; and with thieves and murderers in the cross-roads and public places, where gentlemen drew swords as their descendants flourish toothpicks.

But, again, the citizens were detained. This time, the stoppage was independent of the monk, and there was no need to question him.

Before the archway, over which had whistled the shot

of Charles IX. at the fleeing Huguenots below, three men attached to a lancehead, a guidon—that is, a tongue-shaped flag, indicating a flame. It used to be red, but was now white, since French monarchs, after England's capturing and holding so much of their territory, renounced the once royal color. This banner was supported by another, square, heavily fringed so that it could not display itself; it was the Royal Household Brigade standard, at present in the charge of the musketeers.

These emblems and a notable stir within the issue denoted that the king was going forth. It was late for a royal journey, or because it was late, King Louis, the Morose, wished to make one of his stealthy trips to a suburban retreat. He liked nobody to be about.

Immediately a squadron of cavalry in uniform, having black horses—it was the Black, or Capt. Treville's, Company, therefore, and the more remarkable as the troopers "mounted" themselves—sallied forth. They encompassed their flag. A red plume, on all the beaver hats, was to betoken that they were in the saddle for duty. It was their particular office to guard the "just" King of France.

The captain so importantly burdened, sat very upright; he was grizzled rather than gray, hardened under his corslet and gorget, but carrying them and the horse cloak jauntily; darting his deepest black eyes in all directions and twitching a sharp, hawkbill nose as if he could scent evil, had any signs been near. His baldric held a long sword, and his belt, so tight as to preclude the reproach

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that he had become corpulent in his work, held two fine pistols; his large ones were in the holsters, with the cover caught back. This was, like his followers, equipment for war.

Among the military could be distinguished several, all good riders, but not armed for battle, though having swords. They were of the personal service, civil officers of the sovereign. Then came some subordinates, clerks, secretaries, functionaries, guarded by the varlets of the musketeers, who were all gentlemen. This rank and file, too, were of noble strain.

These servants were truly soldiers; carrying firearms, only less elegant than their masters; under standing orders to make prisoners, or "finish" those whom their masters in a charge overturned. They replenished discharged muskets or replaced a lost or broken sword.

The trumpet and drum were silent on these night marches.

Still, the silence was comparative, the arms clattering and the horses, heavy with harness and armed rider, tramping loudly. The place before the church, being undermined with the crypt, reverberated hollowly.

The group about the friar, jostling his broad shoulders in the gray frock, stepping on his toes in their sandals, and almost shoving aside his full, black beard to see the better, strove to pierce the mass of horses, steel-coated and cloaked bodies, and waving plumes on the flapping hats, to obtain a sight into the midst.

The monarch was just visible, so far as the pallid,

waxen countenance was concerned, since he wore his eternal mourning of black.

Louis XIII., which order was already of bad augury, was not yet thirty. He looked small and light, in spite of the huge riding boots and the white gauntlets exhaling perfume; while his slouched hat had black ostrich plumes clouding not an amiable face. His forehead seemed the more low for this; his lank, black hair streamed beside cheeks hollowed and the nose prominent. One would think he was released from prison rather than his own palace. His eyes did not look up, but around, furtively, seeing deeply, but staying briefly on any object.

Two mustache tufts were too slight to broaden the face, while the chin "goatee," pulled down in fits of nervous distraction, elongated it.

It was Don Quixote without any chivalric mania.

This was no typical French ruler, but a prince of the Italian decadence, haunting, melancholy, disappointed for all time.

"That's his jester!" said a spectator.

"No, sir! it is his doctor! I know his apothecary, at the Gold Pills and Mortar!" corrected a bystander. "His jester has given him up, saying that his majesty was the hardest man to amuse in all the kingdom!"

Four torches were suddenly kindled at the ironbound lamp swinging from the gateway keystone. With these, as many lackeys rode, a pair to the head of the party, with a picket to each to prevent interference, and a pair

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to midway, to light up a gloom becoming double by the king's depressing mood.

The gatewards and idlers stood back and raised a feeble salutation as if loath to speed a lugubrious guest. The whole remainder joined the troopers on the square; the reflections danced in all colors on the church window panes, and the mournful pageant passed the few spectators who bowed and muttered some stereotyped phrase.

The monk solemnly clasped his hands.

At the same time, the musketeer captain, too statue-like to look for applause or good wishes, thought he saw one of the lookers-on, as one who strews flowers to a sovereign passing, toss something on the road.

Undeniably, something was cast.

For, one of the unattached riders, his cloak covering the badge of the queen's guards, shook in the saddle and swayed badly. His horse, indeed, had slipped, whinnied as with severe, sudden pain, and fell where it flinched. The well-disciplined troopers and their thoroughly exercised horses were not affected by this mishap; besides, it was not actually within their ranks. But their captain, a true captain, who knew every man in his company and saw a movement of two or three to dash out and tender help to the fallen one, curtly exclaimed, peremptorily and yet with feeling:

“Athos! Porthos! keep touch! It is the Chevalier D'Artagnan! Let his lackey look to him!”

In fact, one of the serving men, on seeing the gap and

where the missing object was on the ground, had dismissed all other ideas and let the host ride on.

Whereupon, one of the two musketeers, singled out as "Athos" or "Porthos," though a breach of politeness with the sovereign present and of military discipline on the march, shouted out:

"Overtake us at Fontainebleau!"

"Oh, the king is coming to Fontainebleau!" repeated the Franciscan, as if glad to learn something by his waiting.

As this cue did not interest the citizens, who went home to tell that they had seen the king go out, they broke and mingled with the dark; since, with the torches gone, there was no light save from the lamp under the arch, which resembled a funeral vault.

Now, the fallen rider, if not the horse, might have concerned the minister of charity; but, instead, he watched the citizens disappear, leaving master and man to get out of their quandary by themselves.

But not one had lingered or looked behind to be deemed the hurler of that odd tribute to which the queen's guardsman had owed his tumble.

"Yet, I am almost sure I heard an oath and the word in baffled spite: 'Missed!' " thought the monk. He stalked on, pondering: "Now, who wishes the king's neck to be ingloriously broken by a horse's false step? Ah, the hand of His Meanness, the Duke of Anjou, is in the production of such accidents."

During this time, the cavalier had dexterously extri-

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cated himself from under the steed, free from the stirrups, and stood by it, the lackey having caught its rein and so tightly held it as to prevent kicking or plunging. The varlet let it move then freely, to see that it was not lamed; he had dismounted, leaving his own horse, a patient one, to be held solely by his bridle around his arm. He set to examining the lamed horse by taking up the off forefoot with a farrier's cunning. He had a veteran's eye and a good groom's tenderness.

"What's the ail—it was an old surefoot?" asked the master, more dubiously than anxiously.

"Ragot has picked up——"

"A pebble?"

"No, M. D'Artagnan—it is a spike!"

"A spike! ha!"

"Farther! Four spikes in one—a ball of points!" He held out that diabolical invention of one who hated man's four-footed companion, called by several names—an iron instrument which, falling any way must rest on three points like legs and hold up a fourth for mischief.

"A caltrop, by the death!" exclaimed the officer, with a strong rustic accent in his deep ebullition. "Poor Ragot!"

"Pugh! iron is not brass, and unless it be poisoned!" observed the servant.

Since the first Medici reign in France, persons thought of poisons.

"Give me that; it is a bonbon I awaited!" He wrapped

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it up in his boot lining lace torn off, and put it in his pocket. "Well, Planchet, while I look into it——"

But looking around with caution, and seeing shadows hovering about at the gaps which indicated alley mouths, he went on, not at ease since this perfidy, speaking in a tone to impose attention:

"Never mind the beast—it is I am crippled! So!" He leaned on his man's arm, and resigned his horse's reins to him also. "Auch!" as if in pain and doubling up like a jockey hurled from a horse. "Is there not a house you wot of, to which you could lead a horseman crushed under his steed?"

The servant seemed perplexed by this sudden change.

"At the doors of the palace?" he said, wondering. With the queen's guards' barracks there, it was a singular question to put to him. But Chevalier D'Artagnan, the man began to know, put strange questions when he was bound to do strange things. He thought he should obey without surprise. He, too, looked around as if he had been dropped from a roc's back.

"Though not Paris born, I know this part. It is lucky!"

He kept his eyes fixed on a house, so protruding that it seemed about to plunge into the one opposite. It was built of timber and daub; that is, a framework of wood was plastered up with mortar, and once frescoed in the Italian style.

D'Artagnan surveyed it, too.

It had signs, as if turned into a shop. But it appeared

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abandoned, as if even the petty storekeeper of Paris, who could make a living on an uninhabited island, as the wits say, had given it up in despair. In the garret, old rags stuffed up the unglazed sash. Robbers had stripped the sheet lead off the roof and borne away the gutters; lime had chipped off and the wood cracked and warped. The rain had dripped and run down the front, and dyed the bosses and beam ends with red like blood. The whole was so unhinged and rickety that it promised to visit the river in a mass at the next gale from Montmartre.

The sign, slightly loose at one end, threatened to become detached and murder any crowd getting into the recess from a shower. By day its gilding and colors were so effaced that it was nigh illegible. In fact, the name of Gilbert or Philibert had been painted over "Zamet."

"Zamet House," said Planchet, who knew the signs of all Paris, since they were the letters of the street loungers alphabet.

"Zamet?" But it conveyed no meaning straightway to his officer.

"Zamet, the shoemaker to King Henry III., and afterwards money lender to King Henry IV. He, also, say the people, dealt in drugs after the manner of Ruggieri, druggist to Queen Catherine of Medicis."

"Oh, I recall! In this house died that poor beauty, the fair Gabrielle?"

"Not this house, but the better one Zamet graduated

to, as the scholars say. This was his store and depositary for the secrets of the two queens, both the Medicis."

"It looks repulsive enough to be an alchemists' laboratory."

"Does it not? Well, now, it is still kept for the queen's service. Our queen, yours, master—Queen Anne of Austria. No trade could be done in it, and her majesty, to whom it fell as being the queen's lodgings in the town, uses it for entertaining the Spanish, her countrymen, not sufficiently noble in our eyes to be received in the palace."

"Such do not come often and stay long!" summed up the guardsman dryly, resuming his limp on seeing shadows flit about once more.

"Oh, the inside may redeem the outside. A hermit's cell is not so uncomfortable as it looks!" said the groom, optimistically.

As if to show that the house might be inhabited, a light passed down as seen through cracks, so that it was no longer dark, like the Louvre, or the surrounding dwellings.

"Why, it is illuminated!" said D'Artagnan, jocosely. "There is to be a reception of Spanish grandees!"

"It is a good sign," returned Planchet. "Will you not go in here? It has a good view of the palace and its approaches," he added, as if at last understanding that his master played the wounded in order to be in a sentinel's tower.

"It is one thing to ask if one may go in, and another to open an impregnable door——"

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“Oh, the bearer of the light expects a caller, as you surmised. Just knock as we do at the gate when we are late out, and say: ‘In the queen’s name!’ Your badge will carry you through!”

“Planchet, you were named with a sound forecast, better than our King, the Just, or, rather, ‘the Balancer,’ since he was born under the sign of the Balance! You are a knowing file, Planchet, and a finished one, too. Take the horses around to the sta——. No, no, not so! to any inn for the night. They might tell tales!”

“But I do not blab, master! A Picard can hold his tongue in thumbscrews! That’s the mettle of the boys of Picardy!”

“Return to have my report on—the neglected house. We will see if, as a queen’s name, Anne invokes as well as Catherine or Marie.”

The Picard sighed as if he did not like the old names like the latest one, and walked away with the two horses, slowly, because of the injured one.

D’Artagnan raised his arm to the stupendous bronze knocker, when he felt a pang in the side. It was his elbow driving the caltrop, though wrapped up, against his rib, and it pricked.

“I have this trip-iron on my heart, indeed,” muttered he. “I yearn to learn who threw it.”

He knocked, and in an order familiar to the queen’s household, who discovered that she had a signal system arranged with her friends from the fatherland.

The House With No Odor of Sanctity. 23

Our Gascon was all the time adding to his store of knowledge, by the way.

Coming to Paris lately as a younger son—he was the only one of the old Knight of Artagnan, a faded heritage in Gascony—he had endeavored to be enrolled among the Royal Musketeers. He had nothing to bolster him in this extravagant conceit save his father's sword, good name for prowess in the late wars; his mother's blessing and a training more for a squire than a courtier. Oh, there was in addition, a paternal letter of recommendation, as between comrades-in-arms, for Capt. Troisvilles, the Gascon for Treville.

This letter having been lost on the way to town, he had to rely on his readiness of wit, felicity of invention and capital sword play, by which he obtained the trial enlistment in the Queen's Guards. It was a stepping-stone to his ambition—to be a King's Musketeer.

In that corps were the friends he had made, especially by dueling on their behalf in conflicts with that detachment of the musketeers, which, placed at the command of the cardinal duke, had become more cardinalistic than the original troop were royal, which isn't saying much. For Richelieu ran into debt to pay his soldiers, while Louis never paid anything if it could be shunned.

As Louis D'Artagnan was of the age to love passionately, serve valiantly and ingeniously, and to admire feminine beauty, it would seem that he was fairly launched on the sunny, but treacherous, sea of court in

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being defender of that cynosure, Anne, of Austria, "the Spanish dame."

Without his seeing any face, or hearing any step in the passage, the door chain was rattled to let out a couple of massive links, and a gruff voice—male—broken by strong drink, tobacco smoke and hard weather, challenged:

"Why come?"

"For the queen," returned the guardsman, as directed.

"What queen?" was the question-reply, as if the inquirer had acquaintance with many crowned heads.

"You might have said 'which' queen," retorted the young man, a stickler for grammar, as his learning French of Paris was a new thing.

"Which queen, then, pedant?"

"She is called of Austria, but comes from Spain, and she is the pride of France! Is that simple enough for you, simpleton?"

"In that case, whoever comes under such a name may enter, and do it patly, since it is a drafty passage. I avow that all the river breezes rush hitherward, taking this doorway of Noah's ark for a funnel."

The door was slammed to, to let the hook be taken out of its iron groove, releasing the chain; then, opening again, it was held just so as to let the slender youth slip through, and fastened with precipitancy, to baffle the shadows stealing up, as to see after the vanished soldier.

CHAPTER II.

AFTER THE TRIPPERS-UP OF HORSES, THOSE OF MEN.

“So far, good!” muttered our hero. “Town entered, town taken! After the pin in the horse’s soft spot, that grisly monk watching the march out, and those shadows in the black night, I began to doubt I should secure a place of espial. They cannot mean an attack on the castle while the master is away? They do not intend mischief to my lady, eh?”

The doorman was not yet finished with the door fastenings.

D’Artagnan stepped onward three steps in a paneled lobby, odoriferous with scents, from toilet perfumes to that of Spanish leather. At the end was a porter’s box, a recess guarding the foot of wide stairs. Opposite was a large door, carved deeply in black oak, with ivory inlay. The store in there had become a reception room; but cobwebs, fluffy with “beggars’ wool,” indicated that it was not lately used.

The porter returned and flicked up the wick of the lamp in his lodge with a fine Spanish knife, worn without sheath in his sash.

The guardsman saw a man of sixty, erect, stiff, tanned and dried. He was somber, haughty, though no gentleman, surely of Southern origin; a native of the peninsula. He might be one of those veterans who fought in those

wars costing Spain as much in cash as her northern friend and ally politically laid out in men alone. Though she had given the Infanta to France, it looked as if it were no bond to continue such payments upon.

On the man's part, he saw a youthful cavalier, used to horses and play of arms since boyhood; if of medium stature, he was so well knit, and had so overflowing a spirit, that an expert would have chosen him before the tall man of brawn for either a storming party or a long forced march. The spareness agreed with the fire in the large and liquid black eyes to proclaim all that.

The complexion was swarthy, but Paris would bleach that; the mustache downy, under which glistened teeth strong, white and flawless.

With the same impulse, the two soldiers, old and young, saluted quite militarily. But in the day when the private was curbed by the lash, the triangle and the stake, to say nothing of the officer using the pistol and the sword edge and point to enforce his orders, it was complimentary that the youth received a more affectionate hail than the customary submission, like a galley slave's.

"On the queen's service," repeated the incomer, pleased to lean on this talisman, since he was shut in with this formidable housekeeper.

The man smiled, and, reaching out his finger, pointed to the badge on the sleeve.

"That being accepted, can you lead me to some sconce where I can watch the square and the palace front?"

"In the pitch dark?"

“The very time the nefarious choose, I take it!”

“It is so. I have such a lookout above. I find that there are moving scenes in the dark hours.”

“This house has had its moving scenes within, too, eh, comrade?”

“Before my time? Yes, the mob rose against the Florentines, and to give the Medicis a dose of their own physic. They were next to impaling Ruggieri, Queen Catherine’s astrologer, with a picket—there were railings once in front—and a lamp of great beauty; they used its bracket for hanging a valet of that Concini whom our young king had put to death. They made him who murdered him a marshal of France.”

“I would sooner carry a beggar’s staff than the truncheon so obtained!” cried the Gascon, hotly.

“Oh! it is hard to tell. All in the way of duty. As a soldier, one obeys—let the Great Tribunal reverse earthly judgments and absolve subordinates’ doings!”

He must have taken hand in many atrocities under martial rule.

“If you will come, I will show you a fine lookout!”

He took his lamp and preceded his guest to a room on the first floor. It had deep windows and iron shutters, bullet-proof when closed.

“Out of that window, many a time, beauties of the court have ogled ‘the Green Gallant,’ Harry IV.! Notice the side mirrors on swing hinges—you can see up and down without shifting your seat.”

A highback chair occupied the recess; D’Artagnan

perched himself on the back like a page, and began to rub the mist off the panes with his sash.

“Under the queen’s uniform you are welcome to her own, for the queen owns the house! Be a jolly heart, and wholly at home.”

“I begin to do so,” was the reply, as the young man played with the peeping mirrors to discover their scope.

“I suppose that you but little advance the—the——”

“Only a little I advance the—the——”

“Personage expected in the queen’s name?”

“Yes; I am looking out for—for——”

“Her or him?”

If D’Artagnan had been a diplomat, he would have shielded his ignorance by saying “They.” As it was, he looked as if he left answering of questions to his lackey, and, rudely gaping, he turned to the window again. It was looking into a camera obscura.

“As they said they would come at any time,” went on the man, loquacious in a spell as old taciturn soldiers are, “I suppose they will push on in the night?”

“The queen has a standing postscriptum to all her dispatches: ‘Take heed on the road,’ ” replied the guardsman, significantly. “The main question with you, as the receiving officer, is: Have you all ready?”

“Yes, all. Is there anything yet for your service?” continued the Spaniard, as if satisfied and eager to oblige his guest. He closed his fist and made the gesture of drinking. D’Artagnan shook his head.

“That’s the new draft! We old ones were always thirsty.”

“I, never, in a court perfumer’s!” observed the young man, dryly. “The smells are sickening—sometimes, deadly.”

“Oh, I am not carrying on that business.”

“But the poisoner may have left a gallipot or a phial knocking about.”

“I see you are prudent, if young. I will go upstairs and look out of a peephole of my own. My bedroom window commands road and river.”

“The old soldier speaks there. Right! we watch; you above, I below.”

Left to himself, the guardsman grumbled:

“I wish Planchet would return to entertain this old siege gunner. So I may expect to see somebody if I stay long enough! Well, it will not be the one who threw the caltrop at the king. Yet, it might be the employer.”

In fact, no one believed, in the royal suite, that there was any love between the married couple.

King Louis was mistrustful from the first. He had a look at the betrothed princess before the official meeting, and while he granted her exceeding beauty, he remained on his guard. His mother wished, as all mothers-in-law wish and contrive, to still rule her son; hence she parted them, while appearing to draw them nearer. She was always hovering around on the plea that the young

wife needed to be surrounded by much attention, that she could not "go wrong," an odd reason to give a jealous husband.

The old intriguante also fanned the flame between her favorite son, Gaston, and the new arrival. Louis never forgot this amity. So he hated his gay and flippant brother as being his direct contrast. He would look black, etiquette to the contrary, when Prince Gaston, in parties, took his privilege of whispering with Queen Anne. Besides, haughty as was the Spanish princess, she was coquettish enough to keep up her retinue of gallantry. The king began to detest his spouse, and encompass her with spies like a Spanish hidalgo.

Embarrassed at being in this plight, D'Artagnan, who prayed to be involved in one of those hidden machinations by which a courtier rises as well as by deeds of daring, was drumming on the window while humming a lay, when a singing in the street stirred him with the irritation one feels when discord enters into his harmony.

The ballad was such as befitted the state of things when a night performance at a theater was impossible; no one would dare go home through streets swarming with thieves.

"It's the March of the Gastonets," thought he, peering greedily.

"Who knows, better than we,
Every tap in all the taverns?
Who knows but you would be,
But for us, in prison caverns?"

Like the wolves we rage and howl,
Scaring all the timid lambkins!
Rapping with the dagger bowl,
While we roar for wine and ramkins!
King of knaves, your praise we sing,
Till you are the knavish king!"

With irony the words to Gaston's honor (?) were set to a few bars out of a ballet composed by the reigning monarch.

"If our mistress is not engaged to wed Prince Gaston, in event of mishap to the king, then this is not the air to which this house will receive guests. They are more apt, these disturbers, to fright off our guests. Who guesses they may be as obnoxious to the prince royal as to the king, that they are to be lodged in this place. Poor Anne! never will she be liked here, who cultivates the garlic instead of the lily!"

But the noisy crew paraded the square as if to provoke repression, and the intervention continued to annoy him, for he mused:

"Prince Gaston's horde out for a night's deviltries. After plaguing the city watch, fine, old, fat countermen who listen without leaving their watch boxes, they come to pester the palace guards. If ever they came under the queen's windows, and my old crusty captain gave me the order, I should delightedly sally and add a new staff to the melody, by breaking a head, prince's or no prince's, in his mask among them."

Accustomed to the gloom, he could descry the party—seven or eight—at the corner of the first passage, sing-

ing and waving their hands as to call up reinforcements. Their companions were possibly in the drinking resorts.

They felt themselves so truly lords of the highway after the retiring to rest of good citizens, that they now set a torch flaming. By this fitful light, the young soldier could enumerate the principal figures, since they were not strange to the court.

There was a certain uniformity in the gray felt hats and the cut of the cloaks—Spanish short—and even the way their swords and poniards were adjusted; but they also showed colors of their heraldic distinctions revealing to an informed observer.

“Yes, they are the Gastonets. Prince Gaston’s miscellaneous and inveterate friends—the more odd as he would give up his own brother to save his neck. That is a pretty loud avowal that they expect to replace Louis with their precious scoundrelly prince. That is Harcourt, that barrel on stumps, who promises to be round as Diogenes’ tub, but never to contain so much wisdom by some gallons. That Dutchman is the Walloon colonel whose Frenchified name, Wallon, has already earned him a sword thrust from my friend, the Knight of the Vallon. He would fight for less, that overweening Porthos.

“Yonder is Puylaurens, I think, for he has two legs like circumflex accents, from taking to horseback too early. Accomplished horseman and—toper. And that is more surely Coigneux, if not Rieux, so intimate a friend of Count Rochefort that it is said the devil will yet take

him for the cardinal-duke's 'Black Demon.' Is this Rochefort linking himself with Gaston, as the Heir—vaguely—Apparent? The street at midnight—what a school for plotting!—to us in the country who pictured all schemes in the curtained alcove and on the back stairs. Noisy braggarts, offensive, who would think that they are at bottom sneaking, lying, a little poltroonish when caught without such backing and without their prince's kennel to sneak into. May the king never have an heir, if it is not to be a better Frenchman than these conglomerate Italians, Spanish and disinherited Christians.

"Ha!"—for a new group joined the gathering and one of the foremost had two pages with torches to enlighten his way, lest he muddied his fine boots fresh from the palace. "I will devour my tongue! but that is Talleyrand, the Count of Chalais, the king's favorite. What a pirate galley for him to shove his oar among! What does he do with that foppish Cain, who would bribe the royal confessor and envenom the wafer if it cleared his way to the throne?"

"Chalais! Chalais! whom the deluded king calls 'his good Henry,' and who since wears that plant, which we call lamb's-ear in our parts, on his cap for token. Lamb's-ear—it is the fox's that sticks out there, by the Seven Stars! Chalais and Gaston! Faith, one sees odd conjunctions from a Paris window. These two are of those blendings of the quacksalvers, which, innocent on the one side, anyway, make the mixture most deadly of drugs. But Chalais is not capable of throwing trip irons to a

royal steed. These others are gentlemen of some stamp. I do not suppose they need watching by me."

The newcomers to the knot were bawling the second verse of the tolerably disloyal lay, improvised with national spontaneity, when a tall, dark-faced man, wrapped in a black cloak, trailing to his feet, suddenly appeared in their midst and, going to and fro, so as not to let one escape, imparted an order which compelled silence. Several drew off from the chattering bands and established themselves at strategic points like sentries.

Chalais was one of these outposts.

"He stands out from among them," remarked the watcher.

"I wonder why? He is young and handsome, noble and in court favor. So are the others. Yet he is the one black pig in the litter to me. What has D'Artagnan to do with Talleyrand-Chalais?"

The man who had disseminated order, and by authority, was not recognizable by the guardsman.

He was not soldierly, but courtly; a little obsequious, as if not always high-placed; and a slight variation in his address proved that he abundantly distinguished the degree of accosting the nobles of different creation. He was graceful, gravely quick and more active than would be expected from his gray beard, full, but that might be assumed, like the masks carried by the gallants, though not donned with so little light and amid their fellows.

Under his cloak flashed a gold chain and he wore a

badge with a medal around his neck, and acting as a gorget. Instead of a sword, he carried a cane, but it was of fine wood and had a curious head; a sort of wand of office. He might be steward in a noble household.

“Gaston’s? No! The Prince of Gueménée’s? For that is the prince, I do believe, in this disreputable gang! What are they idling for? I guess for the prime mover. I do not see the foppish prince here.”

CHAPTER III.

THE KING—FOR THE RUFFLERS.

Whether steward or not, and to Gueménée or another, the dark man, having silenced and organized the irregular collection, walked over and under the eaves of the shunned house. To him went the elegant cavalier, known as the Duke of Gueménée. This king of the fashionables, brother of the Duke of Chevreuse, came of a family so renowned in war that they were called “upholsterers of Nôtre Dame Cathedral,” meaning that the banners they conquered and set up in the high church as ex-votos, covered its fane.

“What did the seer say?” demanded the prince, instantly.

Every word mounted to D’Artagnan and he congratulated himself on his excellent post, probably predestined for overhearing.

“My lord, it is treasonable!”

“Odd what zest treason gives to this sluggish life. Go on!”

“Such a prophecy! He declares that the king’s life line snaps and does not die out!”

“All this time heirless, and—pish! there will be no succession! What about his next brother, then? Is he to enjoy the reigning, Vouvray?”

The name was meaningless, perhaps assumed; it was not given the noble prefix. This was a steward, then.

“Like all oracles, yes and no. Prince Gaston is to succeed his brother, that is flat! but to rule coeval with the queen! Their lines are convoluted.”

“Convoluted is a neat word!”

“It is the seer’s, my lord.”

“Excellent! they are to wed—Anne and Gaston! according to Biblical, sound and standing law, it is politic, too.”

“He did not say that; only that the queen would not long remain a widow!”

“Any sage would be a fool not to say that, since the queen has in her mate no delight, deep or shallow!”

“Delight is not necessary to princes, my lord,” said the man sententiously, and as if princes were indeed a set apart.

“Then they should be parted.”

Gueménée, like the court, meant the king and the queen when he said “they.” Later, “they” meant the king and the cardinal—Duke of Richelieu. Nevertheless, astrologers prophesied and conspirators wished that they should use the pronoun for the queen and Prince Gaston.

“It is a long time to wait,” said Vouvray; “as things stand, will not your highness make a stroke to restore me to the royal favor?”

“It is never too late, Vouvray; but the king, who is not complacent and yielding, like our Louis, must be reached in his rare lenient moods. You know, since you keep fa-

miliar with the palace and its interior, without having 'the entry,' that I have no ear there. Like you, my sister, the favorite of the queen, as that Chalais yonder is the king's, is forbidden to slip in by the private way, and speak daily with one who was her hourly associate!"

"Then I must await the downfall of the king?"

"Plague on it! my gloomy Vouvray, kings are not Methusalehs. Any little thing, a pebble in a horse's shoe, a splinter in a floor plank—pshaw! a wasp in the rose he smells! and hail the next aspirer!"

"A horse! then, your highness knows——"

"Yes, I know something about horses!"

"But about the king's horse. This night——"

"Oh, what?"

Gueménée's tone was so blank that the hearer overhead acquitted him of a hand in the caltrop.

"I wish you would speak out. You are not often communicative, so give your tongue a flick to relax it!"

"Well, the king, coming out to go to Fontainebleau——"

"The king gone?"

"Yes, a horse tripped, but the horse and rider thrown were not royal by a great rate!"

"There, you see that kings are not eternal! but the rider thrown? If it were the Cardinal of Richelieu, it will be silver in your purse from me and gold from our prince!"

"No, only a rider in the train! They swept on, leaving him in the dust as of no consequence!"

“You villain! I believe you threw that iron! Well, we shall see if you are of enough consequence to be hanged, you tripper-up of horses!” thought D’Artagnan, resenting an attack on a horse.

“I told you, a pebble!”

“It serves when it takes the shape of a caltrop and is fashioned of iron.”

“Halloa! This explains! We have been assembled to testify that we saw the king borne into the great hospital with a broken spine! But if he escaped, why post pickets as if we were forming a right royal ambushade?”

“Oh, he is not returning so quickly. That must have been an act of petty individual spite!”

Gueménée must have looked so sternly and reproachfully at the speaker that he winced, for he said:

“Oh, I? I, who base all on his majesty reinstating me! He expelled me but I do not bear malice! I am a loyal servitor to the throne through all!”

“After all,” said the prince, “I think you should be replaced, for you are not wrong in the affair!”

King Henry IV., having noticed evil traits in his son, Louis, had not only ordered his preceptor to flog him personally, and not by a page as victim, but he plied the whip with his own hand on one occasion. The prince, in passion at being beaten at draughts, had thrown the boards in the face of the winner. He, evading, the “tables” struck on the cheek of one of the sub-officers. This sire of Brioc, usually called the Knight of Vouvray, as the title was in abeyance, protested against the out-

rage. The court lawyers decided that he was a gentleman and, as the young prince was no more, he must apologize.

Louis was deaf to the legal sentence as well as to his tutor's reminder that King Charles IX., similarly forgetting himself, had dissimilarly made amends. Farther, Louis held out, after his father had given him a flogging as soundly as he did to his enemies.

The future ruler had simply repeated, with his trembling lips, that Vouvray should be thrown into the horse pond! and to pacify him, it was fixed that Vouvray, pensioned off, should be held as dead.

He became a limpet attached to everybody about court, who might restore him to his functions. Unless, then, he believed that Prince Gaston, promising him redress—as he promised anything to everybody—would be sovereign, hardly would he try to bring the king to disaster.

D'Artagnan could not hear all this; but he gathered enough to understand that this congregation had not come to hear a sermon preached on the curtness of royal lives and the value of the infinitely little.

“They are intent on weightier affairs than robbing a pieman's stall or setting fire to the stacked-up baskets in the market.”

The dialogue was interrupted by the entrance on the scene of the king's brother.

As he vied with his companions in the excentricity of his pranks, his entrance, for it was theatrical, was of so

burlesque a character that no one would suspect a royal prince of its invention.

On approaching the meeting place and stumbling on a wheelbarrow incautiously left out in an alley, dwelt in by the market porters, he had stepped into it, squatted down, and ordered his attendants to trundle him out.

So Prince Jean Baptiste Gaston, Duke of Anjou—and afterwards of Orleans—appeared in the clumsy vehicle, one man wheeling it and two more, each on a side, controlling its course and preventing the prince from being spilled out. They tramped up the gutter, chuckling, and splashing up the mud which made the viewers join in the mirth.

“Mind your stockings, Louvigny!” called out a bystander.

“I don’t care—they are borrowed!” was the reply.

The joke ended by the barrow being brought to a short stop, all holding fast. Gaston, about to rise, was shocked and compelled to sit down, his breath jolted out. Gueménée ran up and seizing his hand, pulled him out of the box.

“Droll, isn’t it?” gasped Anjou, rubbing his legs, which had the cramp. “They say, the nincompoops, that princes have their every wish gratified! Upon my soul, I have longed, since I was a boy, to have a ride in a wheelbarrow and this is the first time the wish is gratified! Odd eh, prince?”

“Very,” said Gueménée, dryly; “if I were a proud fellow, I should not have tendered my hand to a gentleman

who uses the one-wheeled carriage! As it is, may you never want a hand to help you out of the tumbrel.”

As the word, while applied properly to a dirt cart, also is borne by the executioner's cart, this allusion was to Anjou's habit, becoming fortified by examples: in case of a plot of his being spoiled, he let his comrades suffer the penalties, while begging himself off. But the prince only saw the allusion to himself and his crew being hang-dogs—food for the gallows—and laughed long and pleasedly.

By all this, D'Artagnan could not mistake the chief; it was the Duke of Anjou.

By seven years the king's junior, he was but a youth, but so precocious in villany! For this night's escapade, he had donned a heavy mustache, and an exaggeratedly long beard coming to a point. Naturally red and ruddy, another contrast with his brother, he had tinged his brows and darkened the lashes. “Prince Redbeard” was not easily recognizable by those not familiar with his voice, cracking with the “hicky-hocky,” that is, shrill in the high notes, and his manners.

But his compeers hailed him as the soul if not the body of the enterprise.

“Capital mask!” said Louvignay, approaching like other intimates. “Like the effigy of Marsyas at the tanner's in the Arbalest Street, which we daubed with colors, you are improved by the painting!”

“You are a fool, count!” said Gaston, dealing him a cuff, “but I admit, the first of your kind!”

Count Louvigny seized the hand, and after a wrench

to express his spite, kissed it elaborately; but tossing it away, he exclaimed, sniffing:

“Faugh! you might have chosen other than a fish-monger’s barrow!”

“Get in and may it fly away with you into the maw of the fish which swallowed the prophet!”

“This time I excuse myself from the honor of riding in your highness’ coach!”

“Oh, go to the limbo!”

“I do not wish to go where I shall see too much of your lordship!”

“Stay, then, you reprobate, for we need your villainous approval. Your malevolence always recommends you to me!”

“His cowardice and cruelty!” muttered Prince Gueménée. “They are a well-adjusted pair!”

“This Gueménée is a true prince,” thought D’Artagnan; “but why stay in such odious company, which makes him heave!”

There must be some tempting errand on foot to induce his delay. So he redoubled his attention, whetted by the incident, though grotesque, at the chief’s arrival.

Yet Gaston seemed to shrink from exposing his project too soon. He showed all the weakness and wavering of one slow to come to any conclusion of attack, though prompt and active when he had to steal out of jeopardy.

He was vacillating between fear to undertake a thing without ample backing, and yet unwillingness to entrust his endangering intention to too many.

This seeing, and disgusted, Gueménée hummed tauntingly while eying him, almost turning his back on the others. He mumbled between his teeth the latest “portrait” of the brother of “Louis the Chaste.”

“GASTON THE CHASED!”

“The only brother of the king
 Has more men at his heels than he!
 To dun for horse or dog or ring—
 A-trying hard his purse to see!
 ‘Pay me!’ says Cit, ‘for broken door—
 For bussing wife or tousling maid!
 Or for ransacking of my store!
 Fie, prince, that was a crowning raid!
 Gas-ton, ton, ton! Gas-ton, ton, ton!
 What a stunning, funning game we’re on!”

As everyone knew the words and unconsciously sang mentally to the prince’s murmur, the situation was awkward. The burly Fleming broke in with his eternal thirst prompting him:

“Well, well,” said he, with inimitable guttural accent, “if we are all met, why not go into the Fill-Goblet there? I am in a drouth!”

“Hush! drop him into the well! or into the Seine! Nothing less than a river will assuage him!”

“I abhor dose waters! I am a true son of the old Noah! I am not a boet like dose Chalais yonder! he quaff you of dot Hippocrene—but the Knight of Wallon love so much dot hyprocars!”

“Silence, silenus!” interrupted Louvigny, “the lord is about to broach what will allay us!”

Vouvray appeared in the midst mysteriously and whispered:

“Gentlemen, you are assembled to spill blood and not wine—to crack other than bottle-necks!”

And as by instructions, he induced those who had left their stations to return to them.

“Hang them!” said D’Artagnan. “They set out videttes as if this were the king! Is it really something in earnest at last? There will be an arrest of state offenders, at last, for which my captain aches! It is promotion all along the line, then!”

Chalais must have heard his name in the Walloon’s gross voice for he looked in his direction.

“Well, Harcourt, is it a move?” asked he.

“Good watch, count!” returned Harcourt, nodding.

Gueménée examined the gathering.

“We can cope with the patrol?” queried Gaston, nervously.

“We can drive off the patrol of citizens,” replied the prince; “but if the palace guard turn out, we shall be foiled by losing our prey under the Louvre walls!”

“You need fear no scandal,” returned Vouvray; “the king has gone out of town.”

“So the guards will turn in—to sleep!” laughed Louvigny. “I have been of the Praetorian Guards myself!”

“Prating guards! will none speak out?” cried Gueménée, tartly.

“Listen, gentlemen,” said Prince Gaston, at last. “If I am ruly this night, with no cloak-snatching, no purse-

cutting, no kissing under the hood, no clashing of sword to club, it is because—— Count Chalais cannot overhear me, can he?”

“Don’t raise your voice! Stay, he is going over to the Vintners’ Passage——”

“Then, here you have it; my worthy mother, in her pasturage——”

Some smiled at Queen Marie’s incarceration being regarded as a pleasure retirement.

“She is like that ewe seeing the butcher beguile away her pet lambkin—she wants to retain it, but in a tether of her own. Now, her shepherd is her former counselor, the creeping Bishop of Luzon, who, you know, has become Cardinal Richelieu.”

“The old queen left him as a political legacy to your brother,” said Gueménée, finely, amid emotion. “I would as lieve set a wolf to guard my sheep!”

“But seeing that the tool is edged and cutting its master’s hand, she wishes to displace him and resume her mastery. But this straddler of the stream of politics, never yields what he has once grasped—mark that! Counselor to the king, he renounces all other allegiance, when the devilfish gets one tentacle on its prey, its other nine consecutively fasten on.”

“This devil of a prince!” said Louvigny; “he knows natural history now! Stick to national history, my lord!”

“This throwing off the bond piques my good mother, and since a rose garland should draw Louis better than

the scarlet ribbon of Duke Richelieu's holy hat, she has woven such a leash!"

"Ah! eh, eh?"

"Picture that Queen Marie has found in one of the god-daughters of her daughter-in-law, the Spaniard, a miracle of womanhood!"

"Good!" said the gallant Gueménée.

"A Venus Victorious, among green meads and crystal founts, as that phrase-spinner, Chalais, would say! a fair Gabrielle whom intriguers send to court to advance them—or their families."

"Harpies! ravens!" said the courtiers with one accord. "A woman of charm! a——"

"A rival to the Queen Anne! She must be a sans-pareil!" said Harcourt.

"A woman!" thought the listening D'Artagnan. "Now, this is the subject I should expect a Gaston to expatiate upon! He would throw himself across the path of a beauty towards the throne! And his roisterous group war against women! A woman is his enemy! his rival! Let us see his plan aimed against a woman!" and he clinched his fist.

"Unaware of my mother's intention, the queen has invited this young Helen hither to be one of her ladies of honor!"

"If she be young, your highness—pardon! maid of——"

"I know of what I speak, sir!" said Gaston, haughtily, to the censorious Vouvray. "If you know the tale, tell it

better! This lady is young, scarce out of her teens—being Anne-Charlotte de Chanlevy——”

“Hello!” said Harcourt, rubbing his hands, “I have seen a miniature of one of that family! She has the figure of a Pinturecchio’s Diana!”

“I see,” said a portly man, also rubbing his hands as if delightedly interested by this time, “you have here the spick-an-span new baroness—married! hence to be lady of honor! His highness is correct!”

“The Baroness of Sansforain——”

“Puylaurens, how do you know so much to a dot?” queried the Duke of Anjou.

“Because the baron is kin of mine. By the same token I might have been best man down there, if I could have left Paris! That is the burden of creditors—I cannot breathe the country air unless I grind my tenants for rents! I missed the marriage, then! But so did Chalais, for this bride of yestreen is his cousin——”

“Cousin of Count Chalais!” said Guemérée. “Wait! The Talleyrands went from Paris to—— I wager that a Mademoiselle Talleyrand was bridesmaid in his absence!”

“You would win!”

“The pest! just when things were going on so tranquilly at court! the king resigned to his estrangement from the queen—looking to no point for distraction! Oh, this dissembling, undermining Chalais will upset all the peace! I suppose he will have the audacity to present his cousin, on the occasion of her marriage, to the king!”

“Chalais dethrone himself?” said Louvigny. “Being his

roommate at the palace, I demur to that! He will not lower himself a line!"

"No matter! It is either to him or the expansive cardinal that the queen set up this block!" said Puylaurens.

"For my part," said the Walloon, "let us have more and more beauties at the sullen court! I have noticed that when the court is full of beauties the gentlemen drink more, and I am so fond of courts where there is plenty of drink!"

"Silence, Toss-pot! About this rival to Chalais and the cardinal——"

"She would not be the cardinal's rival long, but his friend! You underrate him, gentlemen, but you are wrong; he is alone a match for all of us in league united! with the woman his colleague, whom the king seeks with an amorous eye——"

"Hold!" said Prince Gaston; "there is no time for suppositions. I come to suspend such forecasting. This is a Medusa who will accomplish that miracle of charming the marble heart which my dear brother possesses. Enough that we are on the point! The lure approaches! With orders to push on, the queen's guests, Baron Sansforain and his bride are at the gates!"

"But a woman! a young woman! newly wed!" faltered the genteel ruffians, awed and become respectful.

"We cannot waylay a woman of degree!" said Harcourt.

"The Sansforains are mentioned in my records," said

Gueménée, pinching his lip with his finger and thumb, a sign of growing anger.

“If we have to stop the lady, it is but for an instant!” said Gaston, hurriedly, who was checked and then spurred by this growing opposition. “You should remember that Medusa was born beautiful, but that—that she became hideous suddenly.”

There was a surly silence. Men looked at each other but each avoided crossing glances. The duke’s voice had the glozing unctuousness of serpent slime.

Gaston stared as inviting a question, but the silence continued.

“What is his infernal intention?” demanded the queen’s guardsman of himself.

“Louvigny,” asked Anjou, slowly, almost solemnly, as if all were fixed as fate, “have you made the provisions as I ordered?”

Louvigny stepped into view, as if proud in his way of being engineer in a diabolical task. Ungainly, as if pretending to be deformed—odd ambition!—his bulbous eyes shone rather than sparkled; under his ill-fitting clothes and the wrinkled hose which he avowed to be borrowed, he showed pride in being the assistant of his master in an inglorious scheme. He seemed to taunt the others that he was the royal duke’s trusted one. He drew from under his cloak a bag containing articles which clanked like glass.

“My sirs,” said Gaston, grinning under his false moustache and chin beard like Pan or Faunus, “we have been

perverters of the public peace, overturners of authority and watch boxes, imitators of the footpad and the cloak-pullers! Now we are to outdo those ingenious and novel malefactors called the Disfigurers.”

“The Disfigurers?”

Even the watcher in his window felt the cold chill which pervaded the hearers. For once the followers of the high-born scoundrel shrank in loathing from one of his conceits.

CHAPTER IV.

“THE DISFIGURERS.”

The Disfigurers, or Defacers, was the title given to nocturnal terrors of a new sort. The originators traded on the vanity which preachers of the times, like their predecessors, denounced unstintedly. They moved on the principle that every man and woman believes that their fortune might be bettered but not their appearance. There are exceptions; but judging by their success, they did not meet them. So they waylaid the beaux and the belles, including those who rated themselves in their category. To have such charms of outward mien as were a trump card at court and in the fashionable “Marsh Quarter,” labeled the happy unlucky for attack some night at a dark corner with threats of annihilation of their good looks unless forfeit was paid. Before and subsequently, “Maimers” have been known; but to slit a man’s ears or to clip his nose is not always done without much resistance and that halloaing for help in a piercing tone which induces assistance.

But the Disfigurers executed a movement in blackmail, governed by that silence presiding over negotiations in hush money.

They threatened with one and the same blow, or with the one and same implement, to gash the features unrecognizably and to indelibly tattoo the skin around the cuts.

The implement was a simple glass bottle of ink, glass superseding the time-honored inkhorn.

This, shivered on the face, hacked it and tattooed. The countenance divine became a hideous mask. For, shame to our science, the writing ink, down to the seventeenth century, was indelible, once shed.

The vitreous objects ominously rattled in the bag by the Count of Louvigny, were those blown glass phials containing ink.

It is needless to say that many a gallant who would have died lively to the last under bludgeon, dagger or long sword, and many a fair dame who would have quaffed hemlock without wry face, succumbed under this grisly menace and offered ransom.

This was not the first time that all the prince's hearers had known of this robbery by terror, but, certainly, they had no thought to emulate the Defacers, although they had little but that to learn of disturbers of the peace and person. It was new as an engine of vexing the king, to say nothing of their exhibition of their new acquisition being performed upon a lady.

But all their future hung upon the younger brother, who might leap into his brother's place at any time and the sooner if they gave fate a push. But while they offered no protest and did not refuse obedience, the glances towards Chalais and the other outposts, were full of envy.

“The wretches!” muttered the guardsman, as soon as he could believe what he heard, feeling hot as if he had

been threatened with such flaying and lashing. "This is an outrage worse than death! To deface the beautiful image of the angels, which is a woman! perhaps to put out the sight which deifies us and emboldens us—darts the very light of heaven into our bosom! Under the young husband's eyes to blot his wife's lineaments into a meaningless mass! Out on this caitiff prince and his tail! Chanlevy, Chanlevy? That sounds as from beyond the River Loire, like me! Chanlevy? They are the Champs-levées of Gascony, who doubts? and we are all cousins down there! Is a D'Artagnan to let his cousins be pulled about? Forbid it," and he slapped his sword hilt as if he were speaking to the imp, fabled to be forged into the hollow of all good sword hilts. "As for the Sansforain—I don't know the baron, but he can command my blade since he has the good sense to wed a beautiful woman! Mostly men are afraid to woo the very fine—knowing their shortcomings, rascals that we are! Well, we are going to see if, when the black ink is spilled, a little red ink is not spattered!"

There was a running whisper below him.

"The pretty brown spaniel and his pack of beagles have heard the game coming!" commented the overhead watcher. "I see now why they posted Chalais afar."

Towards the conference gate a glow of purple, turning yellow, betokened that a clump of torches were coming. A little later, by the lights at the Louvre gates, it was clear that the palace guard had sallied out and stopped a coach and pair at the barrier of chains and long poles.

The vehicle, built for the rough road, was ponderous as a Gaulish war chariot; but the pair of horses, superb Norman beasts, made light of the burden; well greased, the wheels did not creak and the broad tires did not sink too deep in the mockery of pavement. The turnout, unlike the glass coaches seen rarely in town, was of the country; a perfume of hay, violets and crushed weeds permeated it; instead of exotic scents. The footmen were plain peasants chosen for stoutness and fidelity; clad in homespun and only identifiable by a badge on a scarf on the left arm. They carried crabtree cudgels, not staves like town lackeys. They wore common cloth caps, still redolent of meal and barn dust. Straws trailed from their wedding favors, great rosy ribbon knots, large as cabbage roses. Two who had not clubs, carried long poles to pry the vehicle out of mired ruts; but they had tied lanterns to the ends.

Besides the common guard, rode two squires; three or four boys, pages probably, occupied a “rumble” at the back of the carriage, excluding the footmen who trudged in the dust.

Two serving women shared the roomy interior with master and lady.

The *anspessade* (brevet cornet) of the palace gatewards, accepted as passport a letter which was, indeed, Queen Anne’s in favor of Baron Sansforain, inviting him to Paris and to her presence. He stated that the king had departed for a country seat, that it was monstrously late to disturb a queen and that he was glad to hear—for he

was apprised of it—that lodgings had been secured for the pair in the neighborhood.

On learning that it was Zamet House, the young gentleman shrugged his shoulders but as he had no aversion to any but the Spanish, and this baron was French though southern, and his wife was inordinately beautiful, he ordered his men to let all pass.

They took down the chain, while he suggested that, the party being within the safe and strong city of Paris, his pages should sheathe their daggers and the squires strap up their musketoons; the footmen, too, ought to hold their cudgels less like clubs of Hercules assailing the hydra, and the two fellows who dangled lanterns on the long rods like a brace of rabbits, might put the lights in hand and trail the long poles—poles apt to put a window pane out or the eye of any curious citizen at the said window.

They were here on the palace grounds, and beyond was the town.

“Baron,” concluded he, bowing to the lady and fixing his eyes on her, for he remembered the title on the royal letter, “you can say your ‘Father which art’ for you are snugly ensconced under the palace wall!”

The vehicle started, raising slight thunder between palace and church, and precautions relaxed under this advice and the cheery “good-night!” of the guards; the whole lightly advanced towards where Chalais and his fellow sentries had announced the coming.

On the other hand, with robber's haste, the Gastonets had extinguished their torches.

“Now, this assembly of twenty prince's darlings, counts at least a score of villains!” said D'Artagnan, summing up the host in ambush. “I may not fall upon him who threw obstacles in the king's tracks, but I cannot fail to run foul of these throwing a block in the way of the queen's visitors. But what kind of patrol do the city watch keep? I see not even a glint of a partisan point under flambeaux! and as for Planchet, is he sleeping with the just and the drunken in the inn where he stabled the nags?”

The number in opposition weighed upon him, for he had no great opinion of the louts around the coach, who would probably flee if attacked on such strange ground, and after the assurance of security, by unsuspected highwaymen.

“If I had the giant Geryon's three bodies, I might by a leap of danger plump into the bowl of soup and scald more than my skin! Bah! a Gascon and his word count as two, and in that faction of flaunting fools there are unscarred braggarts. The young bridegroom can be depended upon to fight his heart out for his wife, and if they offer to mar her by the blackness of Satan and their ink, I will not let my sword skip one! Ho! for a brush with even Prince Dastard!”

And being a true knight, though not yet mature, he tightly belted himself, shook his sword loose and tucked his bare dagger in the belt to be handy, with firm resolve, though alone, to rush out and hinder the misdeed.

Either from a kind of reverence for the royal abode or from the unpardonable condition of the road, the coachman made a blunder in the dark. The vehicle surged like a ship striking a rock and plunged forward with violence, making the pages spring to their feet. The driver, retaining his reins, was compelled to balance himself and finally fell over the side of the box. At the same time, as if the whole were preconcerted, the horses set to capering, rearing and whinnying.

"That scoundrel has been strewing his caltrops and in plenty!" D'Artagnan explained to himself. "They are brought to a full stop!"

The event was to be accomplished before the house of evil augury.

The horses were approached by the peasants who tried to induce them to continue without the coachman, but it was found that the street chain from the posts in St. Honoré Street, had been carried hither and were stopping the horses. With united action, taking the moment of the confusion being at its height, the improvised highwaymen sprang out from all sides and fell on the entangled and bewildered mass.

It was like sharks leaping into the Seine in which a shoal of fish were compassed.

On guessing, rather than perceiving, for the lanterns were smashed at the onset, that it was a set assault, the Baron of Sansforain flung open the window door and leaped out, with a pistol in each hand. But he had to do with experienced hand-to-hand fighters. They knocked

up his arms so that the shock tossed the powder out of the pans; the hammers descended on the empty iron which emitted only harmless sparks. Then, seizing his arms, they bore him to the pave like so many dogs pressing upon a bear. All were intertwined, and fell, and rolled under the anchored vehicle.

The rest of the expert swordsmen fenced with the peasants and goaded them into retreat as far as the moat before the palace; not to be pushed into the mud, to be smothered, they fought as vigorously as men could with stakes opposed to steel.

The lady was taken hold of by this, and forced out of the compartment where her women shrieked till threatened and hushed. Muffling the baroness with a scarf, they dragged her towards the perfumer's house.

But such was Anne-Charlotte's youth, beauty and simplicity, with extreme horror at this attack, joined to the circumstances of her being separated from her sworn defender, that the gentlemanly knaves forbore to do more than place her before the executioner, that is, Prince Gaston.

All the lights had been quenched; only the starlight allowed the rapid operations to be vaguely traced even by the young soldier up above the busy scene.

One torch, being of tarred ropeyarn, fallen into the gutter, fought against suppression by throwing out fitful flashes. By these the Duke of Anjou, a judge, though so young, of physical charms, agreed that here was a well-chosen instrument to sever his brother and the queen, if

women could do what Cardinal Richelieu almost despaired as yet of doing.

Strengthened in his resolve to nip this counterplot in the bud, he sank all tender and human feelings, for his voice was stern and bitter as he said to the muffled one, whose eyes alone glared over the bandage:

“Know that your errand is published here, madam! It is not to be fulfilled—never! Promise to retire and stick to culling and pruning your roses, or by all that yonder church holds sacred, your beauty will be spoiled! You will have a bottle of ink broken over your cherry lips!”

D’Artagnan had not heard every word of what passed within his ken; but this time, as the inhuman prince spoke under his feet, he lost not a syllable.

At this unworthy menace, only too plain, he seized the bars before him and shook them almost audibly, uttering his habitual:

“By the death!”

But when about to bound and carry the grating with him if it should yield, he felt a strong hand claw and close on his shoulder. A man’s strong voice, so firm as to be pacifying even to the Gascon’s inflammable temper, breathed in his ear:

“Young sir, one instant! That is the expected person or I know nothing of such matters. We are bound to do all for the queen’s guest. The queen’s honor is now at stake! I will run down and let her in—if—alack!—it is a big if—you can make more than all but one release her, for that moment, I will, by Heaven! snatch her away!”

“From a prince’s hands?” for rank imposed obligations on a gentleman.

“From the devil’s self, whose imp I believe that duke is! I am but a peasant, but soldiering equalizes me with such bandits!”

“I will descend with you!”

“Oh, no! surprise will be our only gain! Make the effort! Dash out the irons! They are long set in, and the rust must have corrupted—only worth the scrapping pot! When I halloo: ‘Out and lay on the whole pack of ye!’ why, force out this grate which, by the mercy, may enmesh two or three of them; and jump down! While you ply your steel as if guarding the queen’s self, leave me to pluck her out of such pull-devil, pull-angel business! But——”

Through the gag the victim was screaming.

“I fly!”

“I’ll make these bars fly!” muttered D’Artagnan through his grinding teeth, set as he put out all his powers.

Within two minutes, there burst out beneath a cry: “Who comes?” With complimentary reliance on the young soldier, the old Spaniard was undoing the door to open it, though quite alone against a score.

They drew back a little, thinking that only a mass would presume to venture forth.

This brought the group right before the window where the queen’s guardsman tugged like Sisyphus at his rock.

It was supreme exertion. The lead was firm, but the bars had been corroded; they bent and perked out of the

socket; a crevice in the stone ledge also opened and the whole square of crossbars gave way so completely and suddenly that the pusher was all but carried with it into the street.

Upon the head of the Flemish colonel and another or two the frame descended and as the interstices were too small to enclose their heads, like the Chinese *cangue*, it knocked them down in a heap. The Walloon had his sword up, flourishing it, and this and his arm were thrust through one of the spaces. This twisted them both and he relinquished his grasp while uttering a howl of pain.

CHAPTER V.

“NO DEATH AND NO DEVIL DETERS A TRUE KNIGHT.”

The hurler of this novel projectile only delayed to see where it landed, that he might clear it in his leap.

Doubled up like a clown going through a hoop, he bounded forth, his sword between his strong teeth, so as to have his hands free to balance himself and arrive in that squatting position recommended to break such a fall. It was fortunate, for two of the bravoës, having both swords to draw and hearts to dare, and coming over to assist their comrades, struck at him such sweeping blows as would have cleft him at the girdle.

But as their swords clashed, they disarmed each other.

Without rising, crouching like a tiger, the Gascon delivered that celebrated and quasi-treacherous stroke known as “the jarnac.” Prohibited in a formal duel, but justified in a combat for the life, it was going out with thrusting swords coming in. It consists in slashing so as to hamstring a standing opponent.

The man aimed at would have been maimed, but he had one of those sword cases of antique fashion, made of wood covered with steel, and that bent instead of being cleft. But the smart was so intense that he believed his sinews were severed; he limped off, probably to gain the hospital. At all events he reappeared no more.

Checked in his act, petrified, but seeing all, Gaston

stared at this apparition. The queen's guardsman appeared as she rose to a footing like a St. Michael as commonly depicted. He had his sword in his hand; he stood before the iron frame holding down the two or three felled by it, with the lame man fleeing, and his companion afraid to try to pick up his sword, too near the miraculous inter-
vener.

It was a sight to make power itself look pale, in the gloom enlarging all objects.

Instinctively, like a coward, Gaston seized his captive by the sleeve again, and placing her as buckler, drew farther into the door hollow. But at that nick, the door flew open, and in the aperture appeared the soldier. He struck the duke's hand off the sleeve, as one lops boughs off a tree, and dragged her into the hall. The next moment the door was slammed so hard, that the gush of expelled air shook the prince, mentally and bodily.

"Long live the queen!" was bellowed through the thick panels in merry triumph, and Gaston's stupefaction was perfect, as, out of the small wicket through which a porter safely bandies words with inquirers, a wall-gun muzzle was protruded:

"Get you gone, you and your sewer rats!" was the gruff threat.

Gaston had the impulse to drop upon all fours and crawl away disappointed, like a weazel from whom a fox has taken the chicken.

But his pride coming to support him, he backed off the porch and sheltered himself with the pillar.

“It’s not square to the young gentleman to do this thing, as sure as I am named Onfrio,” thought the Spaniard; “but we must sacrifice the forlorn hope—especially when I am alone to defend the breach. What the devil——? Hark! I believe by the clatter that they could wish he were the only man of his sort in the world!”

The host of the accursed house thought that the queen’s ward—for he believed now by her beauty that she was the right applicant for shelter here—was to be saved at any cost.

The poor creature, so shockingly making the acquaintance of Paris, the gay and gallant, could hardly have noticed the intervention of the cavalier, for, without in any way acknowledging the service of this other in rescuing work, she wrung her hands, and, trampling on the scarf which had gagged her, said, between mixed emotions of surprise, horror and wounded affection:

“My husband! Felix, my husband!”

“Patience! they mean no harm to him; you are the main prize!” he said, with a hollow idea of consoling the inconsolable. Lean on me. All was ready for your entertainment when—but——” He guided her up into a room on the same floor as where D’Artagnan had established his observatory. “Here is wine and—pest! Is she going to faint? I thought her of another stock! Pooh, pooh; they will not think to hurt the lord in hide or hair!”

This was empty comfort when they had so handled the lady.

“The town will be turned head over with this affray.

The queen has not yet discovered her moods to the Parisians, but I am from the Pyrenees, too, and I know that there may be fire on the mountains under the snows!"

"My husband!" repeated the young woman, mechanically about to taste the wine to which her folk fly at all emergencies, but repulsing it by its similarity to blood in hue.

"Oh, the queen will defend him, too, like a tigress, saving her grace!"

He again made the gesture, offering and even suing, of a host. For on the table was seen by the light of two candles in silver holders a loaf of white bread on a snowy napkin in a porcelain trencher; silver forks with two prongs but elegant; then a bottle of old port, a hunch of cold beef, boiled or roast, and two fowls, one brown, the other in white sauce. On the sideboard under cover, were other dishes, and some fruit raised "on the wall," which a southerner might disdain for size but which were exquisite in flavor.

The old soldier was not hard, but he had escaped war, so that he believed others, young and brave, would also come through the fire unscathed.

"Oh!"—seeing her shudder—"I am wrong! How could you feast when lives are at stake? But you must take the wine if you are going to look on." Then, listening and gauging the sounds with knowledge, he added profoundly: "And it will be worth seeing, only we have lost the skim of it in these brushes; it is the first onslaught that is worth looking at."

But the continuous clash of arms, with oaths and outcries of pain and rage, these called one aloof from the festive board indeed.

But, strangely enough, there was a voice rising above the little tempest; it spoke merrily, bitterly, sarcastically, taunting, defying, belieing; expressing all emotions but those associated with the serious aspects of a duel to the death.

It was young but not sweet, for it was impassioned. It chanted, as it were, to the ringing of steel blades and the thrusts with their swish and ripping through cloth and leather, like a minstrel to a one-stringed instrument.

In the epoch when men used to bearing swords, accepted an invitation to “measure blades” as to dance, it was strict etiquette to make no observations; a loud expletive or exclamation of more or less profanity or sanctity—as the appeal to a saint was diversely regarded—was excusable only if extorted by pain or surprise.

A silent fighter was the model one.

But though it was “provincial,” or countrified, the young guardsman, as a Gascon, whose volubility was traditional, could not yet overcome his tendency, in fervid action, to grace the click-clish of crossing rapiers with remarks, less relieving him of his excessive vivacity than irritating the adversary.

As these sentences, though audible in the room, conveyed no meaning to the newcomer, distracted as she was, she sank in a capacious armchair instead of hastening into the room with a view of the encounter with which

her husband's with the waylayers might be incorporated for all she knew. She was overcome by feeling, for a space.

This seeing, the veteran brought her a brimmer of wine, bubbling with glee at being released from a long imprisonment, and putting it to her pale lips, he said, forcibly while respectfully:

"Yes, I know it is your husband who is in danger, but if he makes half the to-do over your loss that young guard of the queen does over his loss of the refection I provided—have no fear! Have courage to look on, for which—drink!"

"I must go to my husband!" She rose, and he followed her with the cup.

"You must not venture—I would as soon unbar the door on the Witches' Sabbath! It is a murderous night, and Paris tucks its white face under the coverlet and dares not risk a peep! It is the royal prince's rakehells that are abroad! The Duke of Anjou's. They make a mark of you! Do you not understand that they are foes of king and queen?"

"The prince's! But they will kill him, then!"

"Drink! If they kill him or that young man, for he is the queen's guardsman—there will be vengeance! Now, if you will not look on at the battle for your defense, you must live to see the villains executed for this!"

Whether this grim hint, very Spanish, steeled Anne-Charlotte, or she felt failing again, she grasped the cup



“Harcourt had replaced an antagonist, who had retired, weary both of the insults and the lunges.”

(See page 69)

in his steady hand and drank half the contents. It was like liquid fire.

“Fiery, eh? It takes seven years to tone that down. I can see you glow with it. Good! My old master used to say such wine held vital sparks. There, you can go to the window, if you like. I think it is the end of the fray. It blew too hot to last. Pray St. Jago that the young man—and your lord—hasten!”

Certainly his young friend had not been overpowered, as far as voice was concerned.

All the time he had jeered and exasperated, and his sword had been active, as the lion lashes with his tail while roaring.

In the absence of newspapers, there were tattlers who retailed all the news and what was pure invention. Contact with the court gossips had filled him with personal notes.

“Faith, here is our Lord of Harcourt. Come on, that I may disable you and spare you the trouble of equipping for the next campaign! I agree with your steward that you are right to nod to the beggar at your gates, for the ragged rascal, as you neatly say, is richer than your lordship and may advance a few thousand crowns on fair interest!”

Harcourt had replaced an antagonist, who had retired, weary both of the insults and the lunges.

D’Artagnan let out his spare long arm and extended his lithe body so as to cause the new contestant to parry with the point nastily close to his rotund body.

"Mind, or—this be your last campaign!"

Harcourt was ambidexterous in sword play, but he wanted a weapon in both hands to contend with this over-vigorous fencer, who made him shift his into the other hand from a scratch on the forearm.

"Withdraw when you like, for there is the Chevalier Rieux without his inseparable Rochefort! I owe your link-companion one for the little sword cut which I"—and he pressed upon Rieux—"recommend you to pass to him! Regret, my friend, that you adopted the footpad's profession since, this time, you opened your shop too early or too late. I have tapped the till!"

Rieux, in truth, fell back to patch up a rent in his doublet, which began to be sopped with blood.

The Walloon captain came up, having only now fully disembarrassed himself of the iron grating, which cost him some shreds of his cloak and sprays of his plumes.

"Ha, ha! Is this a knight of St. Nick! You who wear the collar of his Ignoble Order of the Pillory!"

"An insult the more! Are we never to have done with this palaver?" cried the Fleming.

"I cannot afford you the time to digest it!"

And turning, he drove the portly Hector to a horse post, on which he impaled the hem of his cloak, so that he could not disengage his sword thus embedded in the oak.

"Now! now! slay him!" screamed Gaston, enraged beyond words by the escape of his prey and this unknown youth detaining all his choice myrmidons.

“It is a bear out of the Pyrenean wolds,” said Harcourt, disengaged by the diversion on the Fleming. “You have strained the strings too high. These spingalds are maddened when a pretty woman is at stake!”

“They feed on the old *romancers* and tales of chivalry in the south,” also explained Rieux, grimacing with pain. What the mischief house is that which vomits fencers of that high mark and swallows up beauties of her higher mark?”

“Keep him here, and we’ll burn down the house over her red hair!”

Harcourt looked up. He spied a pale face at the window, now without sash or grating. It was the Baroness of Sansforain, supported by the Spaniard, and looking over the heads of the quarrelers to try to see what had passed by the coach.

At this sight, Gaston forgot the interfering gallant, and, gritting his teeth, drew his dagger and stabbed, like a boy, at the door.

“We’ll have her out and burn the house, then!” said he, in a high voice.

“Your highness will have to do all that with his own hand,” said Rieux, too angry to be civil; “for all of us not punctured by that fiend in the eelskin, that Hop-o’-my-thumb who floors giants like the Walloon, will be needed by the cripples to transport them to the hospital. I feel my best blood going, hang it! Was my ancestor wise who established a bed there?”

“Look!” said Harcourt. “Fiend he is, for fair, who is

this King Log whom Jupiter drops from the clouds to make a fool of a fencer like Louvigny?”

“A log—not a laughing stock,” said Rieux.

“Close in, gentlemen, close, and stab at short arm!” cried the duke, knocking at the door as if he craved entrance before the arrival of this single force, overturning the ten or twelve left as his guard.

And he laughed loudly but falsely.

“The prince laughs!” said D’Artagnan. “I had no idea I was so funny!”

“You are grisly fun—but, a pity, they come up with the varlets. Surrender, or you are a dead man, sir!” said Harcourt, hastening back on seeing that the tables were likely now to turn.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DYING BEQUEST.

Count Chalais had not seen plainly what went on at the old house.

He had, like the other outposts, hurried towards the coach where the despoiled husband fought with ferocity akin to madness.

Baron Sansforian had shaken off those who hung on to him after rolling under the vehicle. His pistols taken from him, he had also lost his sword by the belt being torn off, and his dagger was gone. But the hundred feelings which revolutionized him made him ignorant of these losses. He had become the primeval man who fought with tooth, nail and feet.

His surprise at this specimen of Parisian hospitality; the apparent sending of him by the ensign at the palace into such a band of ruffians; the doubt whether the queen's letter was not a lure; the trouble a beautiful wife always gives a man, unless he is so vain as to desire her to be everybody's object of praise; his hurt pride at being disarmed at the outset; the being attacked, as he was, at the first by servants rather than equals; the darkness, mental, as to who were his assailants; but, above all, his being roughly parted from his wife—all these converted him into a human tiger bereft of its mate.

He was in the intoxicated Malay's mood when running through a town with no better weapon than a knife.

He had not even this, but weapons in such brawls are thrust upon one; a fallen arm, a chance thing convertible into a deadly instrument, and the unarmed is fortified.

His coach driver was so heavy a man that having been thrown off, he sprained both his ankles; but he retained his whip, and no enemies cared to go near him.

It was a whip; as the bad roads entailed the adding to the team when the wheels were hub-mired, it had a long lash. Again, as the coachman, occupied with the lines, has but his whip to handle and depends on the guard for firearms, he had amused himself by transforming that implement into a weapon formidable at proper range.

He had loaded the butt with a ball of lead, netted fast and plated with silver. It was a bludgeon with which, when he was on his box, he could have repelled three highwaymen mounted and coming at him front and sides.

"Master, my lord!" groaned he, trying to rise, and finding it impossible. "Here you are!"

He extended the long, slender staff by the tapering end.

The baron clutched it as a drowning man a spar in the sea.

He saw the capabilities of it in this street scuffle.

He stayed not to thank his timely servant, but wound the lash around his right forearm as well to protect it, after the ancient mode of gladiators, as to secure it from being wrenched from him.

Then he took a look at the battlefield.

As he faced the east, he had to his left the returned night watch at the Louvre gate; but, having a whisper that this disturbance was not without a ferment from Anjou wine, as facetiously put, they hesitated; they knew that the duke would take refuge in the palace as the royal prince if worsted, and that most of his cohort surely would be attachés of the palace, or, at least, kin with the high functionaries there.

They simply held aloof; they were in the right, since they were set to watch the gate and not mingle in "street wrangles."

At the northeast gate, the men who slumbered on the great stone bench, wrapped in their horse cloaks, though now without horses, were roused and questioned the extent of the riot.

Gaston had a small force around him, or, rather, around D'Artagnan, working away with his sword as if fresh entering the ring.

Against the baron directly came Chalais and the others free, assisted by their servants, who had pretty well mastered the peasants, taken by surprise and cowed by gentle folk besetting them. They vaguely believed that this was a kind of arrest, and that their master was reckoned as disloyal.

Now, Count Chalais knew his kinswoman by sight, and not only was aware of the wedding, but he had sent her presents. He also knew she was due in Paris; but, though at once he suspected that he had been deceived by Anjou, and that this pair were of his acquaintance, he still thought

that detention and not disfigurement of the bride was Prince Gaston's purpose.

So, hailing Sansforain as the baron, and in a cordial tone, he demanded his surrender. But before he could add, on seeing that the address was correct, that he promised good treatment, the other, having had ample evidence of the good treatment to strangers come to town under a queen's passport, wanted not to hear—as he did—the scream of his wife, to have his madness enflamed into fiendishness.

The response of Chalais was a blow of the whip butt, so like the swinging stroke of a mill sail that the count, struck on the shoulder, recoiled ten paces, ready to yell with pain.

Without waiting to see the result of this action, except so far as that it left a gap in the rank facing him, the Southerner stepped up to that gap and rained blows on the heads foremost, impartially beating to right and left while advancing.

Swords broke like glass before this supple yet stable rod; the loaded end fell as a mace; servants or gentlemen, all receded, and it was almost clear that the furious contender would reach the dark house door where Lady Sansforain had been drawn in by the Spaniard.

But this disappearance was mistaken by the love-lorn husband; he logically believed that the enemy had secreted their prize. He uttered a kind of war cry, in the Southern tongue of old, and charged over the few striving hopelessly to restrain him, towards the knot by Prince Gaston.

The prince was waiting to get in at D'Artagnan and stab him. But on seeing this irate figure running and leaving behind him a trail of felled and fallen, he felt the greatest terror in his life. He was between two fires; that is, the Gascon and this other Southerner knowing not which to fear worse.

His host had melted away.

He could have shrieked out "France!" the royal war cry which must have summoned all the palace guards in hearing to his aid, but his voice failed him from sheer dread.

With desperation he dropped his poniard, and, seizing the stout Walloon by the wrist presented him as buckler. But the latter, in no humor to meet this frenzied husband, interpreting his renewed fury as based upon the wife entering the mansion, caught up the iron grating as a defense.

Sansforain ran full-tilt at it, and overthrew the pair sheltered, and, as the frame fell on them, delivered a back sweep with the whip at the Fleming, imprudent enough to try to rise.

The butt smashed his ear; uttering a terrific yell, the agonized man sprang up and closed with the fugitive, whose back was now to him. He caught him about the loins. The two fell, and as they rolled, Vouvray, unwilling to use the steel himself, passed a dagger into the colonel's clutching hand.

The baron could not release the whip bound to his wrist, but his left hand grasped the other's side with such

a grip that the sufferer believed that two of his ribs were clamped together.

He smote with the dagger, and that grip of anguish relaxed. He rose, panting, aching over the heart as if his vitals were plucked at.

To his dismay and astonishment his antagonist, though mortally wounded, rose with him, as if the blood spurting out to him was a bond uniting them.

Sansforain stood erect for an instant; then, while reeling, he called out in a voice gradually diminishing but audible in the hush of horror seizing all:

“To the true knight I intrust my treasure! Anne-Charlotte, fare—the—well!”

He fell into the Fleming’s arms, but this time inert.

The slayer let him slide to the ground, like a miller who had tried to lift a sack too heavy for him. He was white as a miller, as Anjou, on his knees for a prayer, or because they had given way, stared at the corpse.

Then, looking off whither the Walloon gazed, he, too, became white as a peasant of the marshes where the horse leeches drain the blood.

He saw enough to turn him into marble.

CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH THE PRINCE'S CHEEKS ARE CUFFED, BUT THE
HAND IS NOT DULY FORFEITED.

Our friend was keeping three swordsmen, sound and steady, busy to their content when the frantic baron made his onset.

On hearing this rush of feet, D'Artagnan imagined that more were coming to have done with such a burr as he. He did not look off, for a good fencer soon learns the scope of the human eye; one must keep the glance fixed in the focus or err. But yet, there is a kind of extra sight out of "the corner," which men know; by this he perceived that the sanguinary Prince Gaston was preparing to steal in and stab him.

He also saw coming, like a shot from a gun, a slight figure, without cloak or hat, no sword, no dagger even: armed with a flexible club, the coach whip, which, despite no gentleman receiving lessons in its perverted use, was accomplishing wonders.

He guessed, as he leaped over the crippled and dying, that it was the baron.

Sympathizing with him and with a communion of mind which men of the same moral fiber feel at crises, he shouted:

"Your lady is safe! The queen is true!"

But as his foes renewed their efforts, he had to turn and stand to ward and foil.

He saw with "the eyes at the back of the head," given to beleagured men, that the poor baron, after knocking down the duke and his protector, was treacherously stabbed to death.

It was unaccountable that his disgust at the rakes should enhance his love for this unfortunate young man. He felt, with him, how awful was the fate to be murdered in the gates of the town of pleasure, and his idol torn from him. He would not have been cut more deeply if this had been his own brother.

He vociferated his adjuration of "S'death!" and reversing his sword so that he held it midway by the blade, he swung it round so that he shivered one sword and drove the other two out of benumbed hands.

Contrary to the duello, but he mocked at that.

Thus momentarily rid of the immediate assailants, he spun round as if to flee.

But it was to dash at the Fleming, beginning to smile over his pain at having revenged himself and freed his lord. He ran at him so uninterruptedly, that his sword pierced him till the hilt rapped his ribs. Then, as the body sank, he set his foot against his side and thrust him off, so as to drive him off the blade, saying, sardonically:

"Adieu! Sire van Wallon! you will not again, by your parody of an honorable gentleman's title, offend my friend, the Knight of the Vallon!"

The king's brother beheld this deliberate punishment of his ponderous bravo with eyes aghast; on the guardsman withdrawing his sword, he thought that he would be the next sheath.

Help was not forthcoming.

"I'll through and through you, too!" seemed to say the victor's deadly eye.

"I—I am the Duke of Anjou!" stammered Gaston. "I am your king's brother!"

The Gaston lowered the point. "It is true, but it was not square that a prince should do this thing! Well, if you are to live, live, if long, loathed! Hark! help comes! You have missed your throw, and, for your rakes, like rakes, they have gathered what they shall not enjoy."

Exulting, he scornfully left him, ceasing to pray, but cursing.

"Haste away, my good lord," said Vouvray, taking him by his arm. "Remember the Holy Writ! 'The second child shall stand up in the first one's stead!'"

The broil was over. The darkness was turning to light. Torches blazed on both sides of the Louvre. Lanterns twinkled in the mouths of the side streets. The chains were being undone in the main way so let the watch come at a run.

Horses were heard, as if the officials were roused and were coming to end this riot.

"He knows me, he knows me!" almost shrieked Anjou, with boyish spite at being unable to retort. "Let him die!"

His mortification, sense of defeat, shameful because of the odds and the fear of their deed being related by this principal opponent, reinvigorated the survivors. They rallied, and, four in number, came on to slay this witness of the murder.

“Ha! more of it? Some dogs will never know what surfeit is!” responded the Gascon, with his tongue at least unworn as at the start. “If you are to throw up your caps for him, it is over him slain by your own hands!”

And, rushing upon the prince, as a cat on a mouse, which it had allowed to go off a little in play, he held him to the oncomers, as shield. There was nothing new in the act, but it was not common, even in a Gascon’s experience, that a prince of the blood royal should be a mantle.

To do this, he had artfully disarmed himself; that is, he had dropped his sword into the case, and still unwiped, it would probably be glued there—proof, if this came before the courts, that he had not drawn his sword on the royal duke.

“Scum!” snarled Anjou, like a fox in a trap; unhand! None but the hand royal can be laid on me!”

“Said in time!” returned the indomitable Gascon, knowing that all his future was naught if this wretch ever gained sway of this kingdom.

This insolent coolness daunted the followers, who stood without seeking to free their lord.

It was Rieux, rather cardinalistic; Harcourt, who liked things to go smoothly; Louvigny, who, inwardly, re-

joiced that the prince, who liked practical joking, was caught in his own style; and Vouvray, who only wanted to be off.

D'Artagnan had both hands on the capture. He found as the weakling writhed uselessly that one would suffice. He suddenly caught his hands, trying to liberate himself from the iron clamps, and seized them with his right hand alone. With this singular bat, he proceeded to beat his cheeks and mouth till his grinding teeth had made the knuckles bleed and the lips, too.

"Your prohibition remains true!" said he, sneeringly, letting him go.

Gaston spun round, seized with giddiness from his shame, unventable rage and some actual pain.

"He must die for this! by the devil's forks!" he repeated, as if the words were a conjuration.

"Without being the devil's forks," said the incorrigible Gascon, as if refreshed by this tolerably treasonable episode, and showing his hands, "you have found, I think, that a devil is at the inner end of them!"

He whipped out his sword with an effort, for it had stuck in the sheath.

The swordsmen had formed a line before the prince to cover him and later to attack, upon his threat.

D'Artagnan began to fall back, but it was to have his back protected. Now, they who had used no dishonorable means yet might employ any to realize Gaston's unalterable wish.

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The deep doorway of the unlucky house was nearest refuge.

“When one is one to three, what must he do?” The answer to the riddle is: Die!

But the young cadet from Gascony thought at the very farthest of dying.

Over and above this, the bereaved lady, if she had from overhead witnessed the death of her husband, might, with fortitude still to watch, follow the process of her defender beating off the last of the assailants. Their discomfiture was certain, since intervention impended.

But if our Berserker thought of the doorway for his stand, he perceived that the villains might climb in at the casement and set his previous efforts at naught.

So he stood by the porch post as to command this window.

Then, reflecting that he could not be called a coward, he who had slapped a prince's face, he set to shouting as if he had not lost a breath. His voice, like an eagle's scream, resounded along Dauphiné Street and St. Honoré, up to the Louvre.

It lacked neither variety in appeal nor volume in sound.

“To me, guards of the queen! For the king! Gascony for the Gascons! Turn out, in the queen's name! Kingsmen and queensmen, turn out! Comrade in distress! Rescue, rescue!”

One would think twenty men were roaring under a resonant vault.

Gaston hoped that he should have vengeance dealt upon

his ill-treater; he overcame his desire to flee and lingered, though Vouvray again besought him to hurry.

Thereupon, seeing that they could regain favor if they succeeded in this final act, the piqued gallants resumed.

Harcourt, with all the weight of his body, dealt a straight thrust with which he was carried on, and bent his body. At this very time, as if awaited for, the middle of his back, somewhat broad, received plumb center a large flower pot containing a ball of roots and compact soil; this soil inundated him after the crock flew to shards. He measured his length at D'Artagnan's feet, puffing, his last breath expelled from his portly body.

The others looked down at him. But Rieux, who had the intuition that one drop tells of rainfall, looked up. Luckily he had retained his hat in the skirmish; for it broke the force of a second flower pot, containing a prodigious wall flower; it smashed on his brow and sent him reeling on his heels and fighting with the air, to three paces.

With unstinted profusion, the projector of these missiles, choosing two Guelder roses in their jars and throwing them down at the same time, generously aspersed the two other combatants. Only those who have experienced the ordeal, know the insult, added to the indignity of being the anvil for a pot to crash upon; they will appreciate the exquisite misery of having innumerable portions of a root and gravel insinuate themselves between the shirt and the skin, and work their way, according to gravity, no

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doubt, but very erratically none the less, all the way to the boots.

D'Artagnan might have perforated the whole while thus discommoded, but instead he laughed grimly.

"Earth to earth!" said he, burlesquing a preacher's voice, "clods to the clods!"

"You lout! boor! peasant!" shouted Louvigny, who espied the Spaniard up at the window, whose ledge had been robbed of these plants long neglected; "it is clear that you are no gentleman!"

Launching another pot with an untired arm and excellent aim, the servant retorted:

"Of course, I am no gentleman!" This time it was a vase of majolica worthy of felling a generalissimo; "but I know my dues to my betters. You are entitled to the flowers of the earth! Take them and the earth with them! Here's rosemary for your wounds!"

This herculean cup, luckily, only exploded on a cobblestone, but landing in a pool of waste water, it splashed the prince up to the eyes.

"I go!" said Louvigny, seeing that there were three or four pots still left in the arsenal.

It was time; all fled.

From the two ways, out of the palace, marched miscellaneous bands of soldiers eager to reply to a comrade's call.

And from the east and the southeast, to the ruck of a drum, came a rabble around civic officials, the tradesmen

having their shopmen and all repeating a kind of war cry, peculiar to the apprentices :

“Pit-a-pat! come with your bat!
Rub-a-dub! come with your club!”

The fog and dark were dispelled by the lanterns and torches.

In the front of the citizens, D'Artagnan descried the faithful Planchet.

On discovering that the “rumpus” was developing into a riot, he had sagely remembered that, as in his odd moments, he did work for a grocer in Lombards Street, he could count on his fellow 'prentices bearing him company, according to the Guild rules, he had roused them from their repose with :

“Bats and clubs! the rufflers are out!”

At Sergens' bars, he had fallen in with his ex-master, who was, out of the store, a *quartenier* or chief burgher of the quarter, and implored him to bring with him the reserve soldiers of the post, and save a customer!

Practically an army was surrounding the fatal house, which had again loomed over infelicity.

The commanders found D'Artagnan, like a Homeric hero, alone amid the dead, the wounded, and the broken flower pots, from which waved like wet feathers the up-rooted plants.

“That's my master!” cried out Planchet, joyously and with marked pride, on seeing the havoc that he believed that one champion had wrought. “Now, then, strike!

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No, who have you to strike, for the peace of the good city?"

As a shot or two rang in the air, fired by an incautious or inexperienced hand, the windows aloft were not boldly opened. Without being warlike, the Parisian has learned that, in tumults, shots have an ordinary tendency to fly upward, like the sparks. Yet the windows opened and never a door.

From somewhere or another, as if the torches made it broad day by time as by their luster, persons ran into the danger by curiosity which gives rashness.

In making their escape, the Gastonets had called out with what was left of virulent hostility:

"Another time, malapert! Next time, spoil sport!" to D'Artagnan.

"I am not a spoil face, at least!" had said the latter, as his farewell.

But the same disseminator of intelligence who had circulated the news among the Louvre guards that the whole was a little freak of Prince Gaston, now repeated the information, and it is remarkable how hushed were those who might have responded to the questioners.

As for the Gascon, with whose valor was mingled a good dose of prudence, now that he was safe, he appeared to have been fighting literally in the dark.

He admitted to the quarter bailee that he had quitted his groom and their horses, to run to the aid of a lady in distress, but as she had disappeared during the trial

of strength he had with two or three unknowns, he was at a loss to define the matter.

Planchet bore this out by reappearing with the horses, and offering to go to the palace barracks next the tile works, as if nothing out of the way had happened.

As for the knight of the palace watch, Captain Lieutenant the Viscount Ozy, saluting D'Artagnan as the Queen's Guards were entitled to: "It is clear that the lady is one I saw in the coach in the company of her husband, a Baron Sansforain, coming into town under a letter of favor from the queen. He has been killed, most like, by the strange prowlers!"

"He is dead, over there, but the wolves show his toothmarks," observed D'Artagnan, a little highly, as if proud of his resistance.

"Under the palace walls?" said the viscount.

"In the city confines!" said the magistrates. "If this had been under the Bastile walls I warrant that the governor of Paris would have dropped a hot shot or two with the freedom that that fellow used to fling flower pots."

"Had the king been housed," continued the palace guard, "it were rank treason!"

"They have insulted the queen and made waste paper of her letter of introduction," said D'Artagnan, mounting his horse, a little glad of the change in posture since, though the whole world and a planet or two more thrown in would not have induced him to acknowledge, he was getting stiff in the joints, notably knee and wrist. "Gentlemen who love the queen, you will place yourselves under

my orders." A man on a horse always commands over the dismounted. No one thought to challenge this assumption. "Six of you, under one, to guard this house door where the young baroness is housed, by order of her majesty!"

This proof that he knew better of the affair than he had said heretofore confirmed his position.

At this moment, the fair but pallid countenance of Lady Anne-Charlotte, of Sansforain, was put out of the broken window. It was the personification of hopeless woe. Eyes of turquoise distended in reddened lids by pent-up tears; mouth nervous with excitement, even after the conflict was over; hair which had unloosed itself and waved down in warm, brown sheen; a little flush coming on her cheeks, all at seeing that she faced a thousand staring heads. So piteous that it was very unlike the petrifying Medusa as yet, to whom Gaston had likened her.

"My husband! then is he no more? My dearest Felix!"

Involuntarily, by a sweet instinct, several sprang to place themselves before the litter on which varlets had lifted the unfortunate baron's body; the litter was the grating. His groom had flung a cloak over it, its arms and its legs hanging at each end. The spurs glittered and a pledge ring on his finger glanced.

"Stupids!" roared D'Artagnan, "do you want the town to take fire by the sight, and cry hue and cry on the murderers? Take it into the church! Comrade Nefle," he went on, to a brother in his, the Guitaut company, "run and acquaint the queen with the tidings——"

“But what are the tidings?”

“That the gentleman who bore her letter of safe conduct has been butchered at her very doors, by the mark! and that his relict awaits her orders in the doubly accursed royal cobbler’s stall! I shall not feel tranquil until there is a stronger guard than this few about her! Haste!”

But at this, a man on a gray horse, wearing a sword knot of the queen’s Spanish colors with a dangling Austrian eagle as tag, rode up and all saluted: it was Guitaut, captain of the Queen’s Guards.

“Thank Heaven!” sighed D’Artagnan, in relief. “Captain, I beg to let the word here devolve on you. If I mistake not, none but I hold the key.”

“Key to what?” asked Guitaut, gruffly, but tenderly, to this latest recruit to his force. “To that door! singular house where they appear to come and go by the windows!”

Behind the fair, sorrowful head was the grim, dark one of Onfrio. He exchanged sign of meaning with the captain.

“Oh, what you have seen, that Spaniard must also have seen. Not a word before this mob.”

Addressing the numbers in his curt, grave voice, he said:

“Gentlemen, I bear the queen’s thanks for the service you have done her majesty this night. Bloodshed calls out from the ground for reprisal. Rest assured that justice shall be rendered. The culprits will expiate their

guilt here where they committed it, when the judgment is pronounced!"

His taking the matter in hand for the royal justice prevented the usual squabbling between the jurisdictions of the palace and the town.

Guitaut, champing his mustache, watched the rabble break up, with military patience, and most follow the magistrate. Then waving his gloved hand to hasten the return of the palace watch, he dismounted, gave his man the bridle to hold, and went into the house.

Onfrio, having prevailed on the lady to re-enter the room, hurried down to admit one he knew to have the queen's entire confidence.

When the captain came back, he looked at D'Artagnan to empower him to take the liberty to question.

D'Artagnan remained silent.

"Poor creature! so beautiful—so young! this is an abominable coming up to see the town, I take it!"

"Take it, it is coming up to see the king that did it! The evening was fated when it began with a casting of caltrops under the king's horse to throw his majesty!"

"You seem to have chosen an excellent post to see everything!"

"Oh, I did more than look on!" said the Gascon, with his mock modesty, "but I saw much! It is something to know that the originator of this attempt to prevent the queen seeing her own special visitors had his ears boxed."

"Who tried to thwart the queen's wishes?" sternly demanded the captain.

“It was the next to the throne.”

“The next to the would-be thrown, you mean, my boy?”

Seldom did the captain laugh. D’Artagnan did not take this cue.

“Do you mean that that woman in there boxed Messire Gaston’s ears?”

“I maintain that she is capable, but a man did that!”

“Louis,” said the old soldier, speaking affectionately as to a son embarking on the same rude “sea” of court and life, “do you assert that you did that?”

“Hum! I only held the prince’s hands while it was done.”

“I deserved more frankness. Let me tell you that he is in dire danger who did that much—but still more to be dreaded than he who assailed the beauty, is he who tried at the king’s life!”

“I am not maligning when I think the one inspired both!”

Silently, the two rode back to the palace, leaving the house where Gabrielle, the Fair, was poisoned, under strong guard, for the captain had redoubled that set by his young soldier.

CHAPTER VIII.

EVERYBODY'S, ANYBODY'S, AND NOBODY'S FRIEND.

King Louis XIII. had outgrown his boyish passion for sparrow popping, with a fowling piece made by his own hands, which he lastly used. There were birds in the Louvre hedges.

Indoors, when the sky scowled, he shut himself up for mechanics, beginning those toy water and windmills, lattice work, turned pieces, such as amateurs design and common workmen finish before being made gifts.

Outdoors was the chase in the royal forests, an excuse not to breathe the same air as his "foreign wife." As if princes of France could so mock at politics as to marry where they chose to give a heart.

Between indoor and outdoor games is tennis.

But here the inventive son of Henry IV. had introduced a novel proceeding. He devised three-handed tennis.

On a morning when he had breakfasted heartily and for his diversion put off the minor obligations, the reception called "the first levée," he was in the racket court, playing.

In this eccentric, three-handed practice game, he stood midway between the other two players, all facing the wall; it was the primitive handball played with bats to save the elegant hands.

On the one side was his brother, Gaston; on the other, his favorite, Chalais.

Not so sulky as commonly, he was agile enough to have the best all through. Difficult hits he left to the count; easy ones he rushed from under his brother's racket and so "cut him down." In short, as in royal card play, he won all the time.

"Would you kindly acquaint a stranger to the court—tennis and royal, with the names of the prominencies before us?"

So, a polite stranger, indeed, by the cut of his habiliments, and the unfashionable cock to his hat, to those around him. They were officers of all arms, off duty, officials, loungers, wearied with the same faces but afraid not to have a passing glance from the monarch.

The speaker had happened to pointedly appeal to a young officer in the Queen's Guards. For his gallantry anent the Baron of Sansforain and his wife, the queen had found him a vacancy as cornet substitute. He was in court dress, somewhat military, but his scarf, ostentatiously by its brooch of a crown encircling "A. A. A." intertwined, denoted his company.

On this question about known figures, some smiled, others lightly laughed; but the obliging Gascon, who had not so long ago begged for a cicerone himself, replied in the low voice of etiquette:

"I am Louis D'Artagnan, knight, cornet"—he lifted himself a "step"—"in the Queen's Own, at your service!"

"No more than I am at yours, sir! I am the Knight

Laurent Pontgibaut, next of kin to that poor Baron of Sansforain, killed at the gates of Paris——”

“Ah, then you heard of the disaster down in—Sain-tonge or Limousin, is it?”

“In Auvergne, by your leave! Yes, we heard that bandits attempted to overthrow King Louis, issuing from his palace gates, and did murder my relative at almost the same spot!”

“Oh, the news reached you that the Parisians no longer strew their sovereign's path with roses, but——”

“Thorns out of Vulcan's garden, or rather, smithy—in brutal language, caltrops! As for the slaying of my cousin, I beg to offer you my hand, for I was assured that all one man could do to help another overwhelmed with numbers, the Knight D'Artagnan essayed!”

“Not at all! The news got askew on the road! I enabled the baroness to get safely into a house, but as for the baron, he fell fighting all alone! It was impossible for me, with the lady on my arm, so to say, to do more than execute his actual slayer! It appears that he bore a safe conduct from the queen, so that I have heard nothing of trial for my having made a saw edge on a good Spanish sword in the fray.”

“I am delighted you are of Gascony! It is a fine wind that blows neighbors together in this inhospitable town!”

“I can understand that you wish, before moving more or less on behalf of your kinsman, to see how the wind blows! Your question again?”

“To know those players!”

“Speak lower! it is the watchword!” D’Artagnan winced at the country gentleman being a little loud and obtrusive. “The foremost of that trio is our just king!”

Pontgibaut touched his hat deferentially.

“He looks worthy commiseration; he must have had mutton for breakfast and the fat was cold; yet, as he is lively by fits and starts, I believe that he swallowed the capers in the sauce and is so far animated!”

D’Artagnan smiled at the rustic wit.

“I see, with no offense meant, that you are no friend of his majesty?”

“They say in our parts that he is nobody’s friend.”

“Oh, do they say that, there? Curious! Oh, these nicknames are not to be taken at the letter! The king is not effusive, or hasty; not hanging his heart about his neck, but like those old wheel-lock arquebuses of our fathers, slow to wind up, but when they shot, killing undeniably! He husbands his shot and then it tells—witness that Marquis of Ancre!”

“Canker!” said Pontgibaut; “we know his fate.” He had frowned but he assumed a pleasant face and his voice was quite even as he pursued:

“I can’t see a likeness, yet I do believe that the fair junior of his majesty is his brother——”

“You are indeed beholding the second luminary of the reign, his royal highness, the Duke of Anjou!”

“As I watch him return the ball so as to hurt nothing,

and with the air of only just being able to do that much, it must be everybody's friend!"

"Yes, yes, Anjou!"

"He looks very amiable—even to his brother!"

"Even to——"

"Oh, I am fresh from school—I still remember copying Tacitus, and the line applies: 'Rulers always suspect and hate the next in the line!'"

"Nonsense! for Louis does not scorn Jean Baptiste Gaston yet."

"Then he did not know that Prince Gaston diverted the Baron Sansforain from presenting his bride to the court!"

D'Artagnan eyed the speaker sternly; this man from the country knew too much and guessed too accurately to want information that he would willingly give him in this place.

"You will have divined that the third hand is——"

"Anybody's friend!"

"Apt and pretty! you have hit off the generic denominative in so capping the Count of Chalais! Anybody would prefer him as a friend in the royal confines! See how neatly he lets the king get that ball!"

"Would he face a musket ball as coolly?"

"More jauntily! Oh, the Talleyrands are courageous!"

"He would have slain his cousin, Sansforain, to make his wife his widow!"

"As I was on the ground, I am not going to back that! He was cheated—not the first, by that wily duke!"

"He let the lady be maltreated——"

"No, no! there was no maltreatment! and Chalais did not see her, for, recognizing, I doubt he would have fallen in with the band."

"Well, it is to you and not him that the poor, girlish widow owes her life!"

"If you are going to thank anybody, pray keep the thanks for a manly hand that dropped flower pots out of the hanging gardens of Zamet House! Being an old soldier, a *petardier*, he used such missiles with first-rate accuracy! I prefer on the whole his novel discharge to a charge of a whole phalanx of Spanish spearmen."

Pontgibaut was silent. When one travels day and night to avenge an outrage, but discovers that the instigator is the king's brother, it is a block to a forward step. This is saying nothing of the supposition that the king approved of the roads being clean for the pair to arrive.

"So that prince wished to deface that lady?" muttered the visitor, trying to speak calmly.

"Deface! Judging by her grief at learning her cruel loss, he only anticipated the disfigurement, for I believe that she was within an ace of clawing her features to a mask, after Jewish precedents. I tell you, the king, who is just, would have avenged that self-torture on those who seconded his brother——"

"As for the brother——"

"Oh, king's brothers are only exiled, that is the extreme in France!"

"If he were exiled to Auvergne, where the Sansforains are loved, such exile would be equivalent to exe——"

“But Prince Gaston has no idea of going into Auvergne!”

Pontgibaut recognized that he had conceived too great an enterprise. The king and his brother were assuredly above any but a Clement or a Ravailac; but if he called out to “draw and defend!” this link between the two: the favorite?

Would this happy man accept his challenge?

Henry Talleyrand Chalais, count, was a man in his thirtieth year; but all had gone so trippingly with him that he looked younger. Fair and inclined to freckle, he used cream and powder so fine that it adhered and did not fall off even while he languidly played. He was handsome, and all he did effeminate did not unman him. Never did he drink or think deep. He was vain, and to be in good odor, stooped to acquaintances which won him the title employed by Pontgibaut, of anybody's friend. Nevertheless, though all courtiers become venal and the arch one, the favorite, illimitably so, he did not so often sell a post as let himself be wheedled into disposing of it.

But Chalais desired a reputation as wit, since deeds of arms seemed rarer and rarer after the exhaustive great wars, and to show his smartness of tongue, he spared not friend, princes, or, though it was apparently less risky, the king his patron.

Pontgibaut shook his head, revealing that his opinion of his relative, become his foe and the butt to be chastized for the fatal affray, was leaning to the severe.

"A peacock, but he will fight like a turkey! That ball might have given him a black eye if he had missed it, but his rebuff was quick and determined."

D'Artagnan was studying this provincial visitor. He heard some of the comment.

"You are a judge!" said he. "Many a court darling would face a pistol bullet rather than the tennis ball singing on the dainty nose! Chalais is brave! he has proven that, in more than one meeting."

"When, as the other night, he had the Anjou faction at his side?"

"No, they were at his back. He went alone to meet his lamented cousin. Frankly, for I do not dislike Chalais, he does not use his ascendancy over the king wisely, but he does not abuse it! If he consorts with the Gastonets, it is because he wishes to have his king rid of that bondage growing stronger." He looked carefully at the stranger to see if he might be trusted farther yet, and conjectured that he stood in no danger from one bluff, frank and upright.

"You see, all the king's men who foresee, dread the influence of a crafty, resolute man like Cardinal Richelieu, not the fantastical course of a favorite."

"This Richelieu? Upstart!"

"That counts not against him! One must start from the mother earth some time back!" said the Gascon, hurt a little as an aspiring adventurer himself. "When the king is a cipher, he becomes ten times stronger by having a figure one set in the right place before him!"

But as it was clear that the newcomer was set on one purpose, he retook that subject.

“Chalais is brave, rest on that! He comes of the Montluc breed.”

“Yes, we boast of Marshal Montluc!”

“Called ‘the French Lion’ by his foreign foes!”

“A lion keeps his range to himself; it is not lionlike to troop with jackals and foxes, in the night.”

“The red fox also hates the red stockings—Riche-lieu, as cardinal.”

“I suppose you mean that the former Bishop of Lucon—he confirmed me there—holds the king in another leash than Master Chalais’?”

“Bondage! Who said bondage?” said D’Artagnan, believing that ears were pricking up in their vicinity. “Tutelage, the cardinal, is a grand counsellor; spirited, spiritual and inspiring! The pope left the choice of the royal confessor in his hands. It is grand to have Rome approve of one’s efforts!” and the guardsman saying this loudly, made a low bow to an ecclesiastic, who passed closely.

Pontgibaut bowed, too, taking the cue that black robes might not be loved but the red one was feared. Even in the rural districts, people talked a good deal of the ecclesiastic who had kept the conscience of the two Medici queens and extended his rosary towards the ruler.

“I see that, as I must meet a brave man, I should set my pick on anybody’s friend rather than everybody’s!”

“My dear neighbor, if I were a general, I believe that

I should quail before an army of asses led by a lion, sooner than the army of lions following the fox."

"Chalais being a lion, as his fellow fops are asses——"

"Chalais is doubly leonine, I reckon, since, while Montluc by the sword side, he is of the brave Bussy stock by the distaff!"

Pontgibaut was not a widely read man, but he had heard of Bussy D'Entragues, hero of not too remote times (whom our readers may remember in "The Lady of Monsoreau" and "The King's Gallant.>").

At this juncture, the king's physician and body attendant, Jehan Herouard, stepped within the cord keeping out spectators and notified his patient that he had exercised amply upon the hearty repast. The courtiers parted, and united to pay their salutes to the king and his brother, as well as to hail Chalais, who had manipulated the ball so as to please both the antagonists in the triangular game.

Pontgibaut was about to salute his adviser, but the latter had moved with the throng to greet the king.

Chalais disappeared in the dressing room, whence he emerged in the extreme of fashion, set in a measure by himself. Certainly, he was in dissimilitude then to the cousin from the meads and moors, whose rusticity was emphasized. As the latter put himself deliberately in the beau's way, he was forced to salute him. He thought he was just a suitor, and, as Pontgibaut did not have his speech ready, was going to pass on, smiling, when he thought he recalled the face. He turned, therefore, as a

courtier has to be careful not to "cut" a person of affinity, when the latter said, in low but vibrating tones :

"My Lord Count of Chalais, I am the bishop's-knight of Pontgibaut, and I come to Paris to demand an accounting of you, my cousin, of Talleyrand and Chalais, for the Baron of Sansforain and his wife, the former having been done to death under your eyes with you in the ranks against him, and his wife spirited away also under your own eyes."

Seldom had Chalais, or anyone, heard such an address almost in the royal presence. On the royal grounds, at the extreme least.

"Sir!" began he, but controlled his voice by an effort.

"The Vidame of Pontgibaut——"

"Oh, Vidame of the Pont-gibbet, if you like! This is no place——"

"I am nowhere out of place to denounce the noble who lets his kin and kith be slaughtered in the shade of his mantle! You are a recreant peer to let a knight be murdered by varlets, and no knight to let a lady be carried off!"

Chalais bore this very well; all he endeavored to do was to prevent the remote lookers-on seeing in this more than a wrangle between the dispenser of court holy water and a suitor angered by his quest being fruitless. This was a common occurrence, where the king's minion was concerned.

"Vidame," said he tranquilly, but his eyes betrayed his roused fury at this interlude to his pleasant comedy of

gulling the king, "you are right. This spot is as well as any for stating your complaint. But I can hint at another more fit for my redeeming the slurs cast on me. I do not stop to enlighten you, badly informed, but I beg you to keep an appointment with me. I have not the slightest wish to have your companionship in a ward of the Bastille prison; for the recent governor has been replaced by one of our enemy, the cardinal minister's tools. See me in an hour, on the new bridge, which even you as a late comer can readily find."

He finished with his ordinary conciliatory voice, without any tremor, and even laid his white hand lightly and pacifyingly on the other's heaving shoulder. To a distant spectator, it was an admirable triumph of courtliness over the untaught, animal passions of that rapacious monster, the craver of suit at court.

"Suppose," continued the royal "darling," letting himself indulge in his sarcastic vein, "that I find fault on the bridge with—with your boots, as it were! Faith! do you not use cart grease for the anointing of them down your way? We are otherwise shod in the palace precincts by all that is odorous! And I could reflect on your spurs, save the mark! We do not have plows made by the village blacksmith rip our Turkish carpets in the Louvre! In an hour, I will find fault with your boots and spurs!"

"In an hour you will find fault with my sword, dainty reptile!" grumbled Pontgibaut, not knowing whether he had achieved his intention or not by being turned off thus suavely.

But to persevere would only entail not only the bystanders' jeering but arrest for a quarrel here. He stood, red in the gills, and wondering what attitude he could take in passing through the rows of dapper, fastidious and gaily costumed idlers, who began to look his way.

But D'Artagnan returned in time to see that to his mind all had been cleverly arranged, and without publishing the defiance, had come to look upon the stranger as in some sort pupil of his.

So he hastened to approach and felicitated him on comporting himself well during the reception of this "challenge under the cloak."

"Is it settled?" demanded he, but, without waiting for an answer, he added: "I see it is, since Count Chalais is securing a second! It is his roommate, and—it is Count Lauvigny! but you would not know—he will second him, for he is one of the set of Prince Gaston, and a defacer, whose nose I put out of joint, by the way! I will not be sorry to pull it the other way into straightness!" and his eye flashed fire at recalling the dastardly scrimmage (*escrimage*, a fencing *mêlée*).

Pontgibaut congratulated himself on such a warm ally. He was experiencing the feeling of one lost in a great city—or at all events in so odd a situation as among the court gadflies.

Having chatted with Louvigny and, then, with another, as if he were making up an excursion or a dinner party, Chalais nodded over to his cousin as if all were ready on his side.

Pontgibaut could do nothing in assent, until D'Artagnan remarked, with his way of taking things as granted, which was presuming in so young a man:

"Count me one, and I shall find you another supporter, sir!"

The bishop's-knight could have laughed with joyous relief.

To combat with the king's favorite and to be backed by a queen's guardsman—a choice soldier—his cup might be deemed full; but no cup but can hold one drop more.

"I believe I have in a comrade of mine in the Royal Musketeers the precise round peg to fit the gap!" continued the Gascon.

And a King's Musketeer in addition! Pontgibaut, spite of his boots being countrified, walked on air.

D'Artagnan was looking around. Suddenly he held up his hat straight off his head: it was a signal. A broad-shouldered, sturdy-legged person, parading negligently, for he had come off guard about the king, obeyed the summons with eagerness, but no eagerness deprived him of a stateliness due to his ponderosity. He was in stylish dress but over all was the cassock, or herald's shirt, fixing his regiment; on the front in the center were four L's, two back to back, and two similarly placed but upside down, so that the four formed an open cross; at each angle was *fleur-de-lis*; this was the emblem of the King's Musketeers of Louis XIII.

He came up three feet to a stride, and extended to

D'Artagnan a hand in which the latter's completely disappeared.

"The Chevalier Porthos," announced D'Artagnan, seeing that at the sight of this magnificent cavalier, the rural squire blushed as deep a tone as the musketeer's crimson cassock, "will you do me the honor to accept the Count of Louvigny and the Knight of Reiux's company to arrange a little difficulty over the swords of this gentleman and the Count of Chalais? I am to look on, with you, and see fair play, on the new bridge."

Porthos nodded as if this were an invitation to draw straws as to who was to pay for a wine luncheon.

"I assure you that the foolery is exquisite and, like all good jokes, is likely to turn to earnest. We have here a cousin *à la mode* of Gascony of mine, the Vidame Pontgibaut! I answer for him that he will be stiff in the sole and firm at the heel in the discussion. By the way," though the musketeer did not seem inclined to listen to any details, "it is about the superiority of town-made over country-made boots!"

Then, in a whisper, he subjoined:

"If I am not pitted against that skulking Grammont again, and you are, do not let him 'scape!"

Pontgibaut had been concerned in more than one hostile encounter in the woods and wilds, but this sauntering into a deadly collision with all the lack-heat in the world, perplexed him. He stared after Porthos, who lounged over to where Chalais' two friends evidently awaited him or D'Artagnan, and was almost dumfounded.

CHAPTER IX.

VANITY'S PARADE GROUND.

Without knowing it, Pontgibaut ought to have written home at once that he was given an introduction into Parisian life simply enviable.

In the first place, in what company would he confront the king's "pet?"

Chalais had selected two friends happening under his hand: Rieux, his "bosom friend" until Louvigny superseded him, and this Louvigny himself, who attached him to Prince Gaston.

Roger Grammont, Count of Louvigny, was brother to Marshal Grammont's elder son, being cadet of this house. He had not a penny, it follows, all going to his elder, and yet he tried to make it out that he was more of a beggar than in reality. He was a niggard among niggards; and a friend returned from a visit to Scotland, had asserted that he would look less indecent in Highland dress than the breeches he wore. He had only one shirt; it being washed and "got up" while he sipped his chocolate in bed.

One day, Chalais sent for him in hot haste.

"Even the count will have to wait," said Louvigny, out of his morning nap, "for that's my sole linen on the chair, at the fire!"

This would have passed as eccentricity and at court this patch on the gold and jewels only set them off; the king might have been made to laugh which was more than his jesters could succeed daily in doing.

But Louvigny was, despite his extraction, a coward; no gifts can redeem that fatal flaw in manliness. Even the effeminate minions of Henry III. went to their deaths boldly. Probably the law of contraries ruled; for the fearless and fastidious Chalais repulsed Reiux, who was gallant, in favor of this vermin. But men have been known to fondle pet rats.

As his roommate, Louvigny became the go-between, for Chalais ostensibly, but for others, no doubt, who wished to move the king by his pawn. Dexterous in standing on two stools, this young Grammont could reach the ear of the king of Anjou. Through Reiux, and therefore Rochefort, Louvigny was in contact with the prime minister, too.

As for the queen, her influence was cumbered by her union with her brother, France's eternal enemy—Spain!

Louvigny had the miser's keen cunning; he divined that Richelieu was a stream which none could divert and few might temporarily dam. It was as some low curs avoid the man they know would kick them out. In a rare moment of garullity, he had said that "When the king was seated in the cardinal's favor (?), the count (Chalais) would be first gentleman of the king and that he, Louvigny, would take his post of master of the wardrobe."

In short, from Chalais so audaciously regulating a duel

almost within the king's presence, Louvigny imagined him to be greater than the saturnine monarch.

In less than an hour, all the actors in the next drama were assembled on the new bridge.

Constructed about 1600, it was ever called "the new." It was the sole popular strolling ground of Paris. For a Pontgibaut to return home and confess that he had not wined, dined, and resigned to have his pocket picked while listening open mouthed, to the open-air performances of the play actors on stands under the houses lining the water thoroughfare, was tantamount to a traveler talking of his tour of Rome without allusion to the Seven Hills.

But this time, Pontgibaut found no attractions in the motly mass of beggar, lordling, beauty, horror, soldier and spy in some politician's employ—not that the prospect of the battle daunted him, but he was disgusted with his illusions being dulled, and his loyalty fading.

His dead relative had learned that the warning in the queen's letter for him to be "wary on the road," was no libel on the state of the king's highway; that her post-script that "her name was the bearer's safeguard" was meaningless, where she was hated as a foreigner and reviled because so much more beautiful than the other ladies of the court. He was vexed by seeing the king amiable to the Jacob who envied his birthright; to his favorite who had connived either at his own fair cousin being decoyed to town to be "widowed by steel," or at her being "de-faced" not to be rival to himself! As for this Chalais,

he heard in the throng about him, that it was Chalais who had asserted that he could poison his master, being superior officer of the wardrobe, by fastening on the neck which he Judas-like embraced, a poisoned collar! He saw the courtiers fawning on Louis for cake, but ogling the Duke of Anjou because he might have a cake to crumble to them some day.

To him Chalais was that degraded thing, a cur which served two masters. He rejoiced that he might be the instrument to kill him.

"If the king were really inspired with justice!" he thought, "he will reward me!"

The center of the outdoor "shows" was the booth of Fat Guillaume, where was represented Hardy's "Triumph of Tiberius." Pontgibaut recognized his second with the gigantic Porthos, who had not renounced his cassock but turned it inside out so that its lining, of glazed cambric, was far from suggesting its glorious right side. A little farther was Chalais, with Louvigny looking like a knight of adventure on his last legs, and Rieux.

"Rencounters" were common here, because it was under the general eye; in the absence of newspapers, the gossips had to see what they were to disseminate. So the gallants who might have held their battles in the suburbs uninterrupted, preferred this rendezvous. If the quarrel were about a pin, the seconds separated the pair after a little parade of a new sword and the latest feint or thrust; if one were wounded, they hurried him into the first barber-surgeon's, whence he emerged radiant, with a

white bandage on the arm and was carried into the restaurant in vogue. If serious, there was the hospital, and vanity was again regaled by the imposing procession of friends, the mob and the servants out of place who accompanied, fighting to have a hand on the barrow poles so as to be entitled to a silver sixpence.

There was a bridge guard at the outer end, but its patrol rarely extended to the town side, unless the worthy militia wished to see the new farce in the booths.

But this time the combat was to be fierce, after the manner of those recorded in Josephus, under Jerusalem's wall.

Chalais was nettled by the predicament.

At the same time that the beauty of Anne-Charlotte struck him, he felt that his sway over the king was waning—who had never let any but Luynes dwell serenely with him up to death.

To see your patron lukewarm is like the first wrinkle to a reigning beauty. The favorite resembles those tragedians who cannot endure that even the principal actress should obtain applause on the same stage. He began to hate the widow of Baron Sansforain, and perceive in her an enemy and rival.

He would not wear mourning for her lost one. He felt wounded at being picked out—he really so guiltless of the disaster—to be the defender of Prince Gaston. He felt that in Anne-Charlotte the latter would find a more dread disputant for the king's favor than any duke or cardinal selected.

He vowed if he came off the better man, to cling to the

prince, since the king must have prompted this calling the young bride to court. He was of the opinion, that Queen Anne, from her estrangement with her husband, would never be but a cipher.

At the same time he disliked the champion's determined air.

Their families might be cross with him that he had not satiated their remorseless maw. They had chosen this man to seek him out and remind him that he was mortal!

But the crowd on seeing the mock quarrel as conceived and all but rehearsed, in a humorous light, annoyed him terribly.

Not two days before, two valets, wearing their master's cast-off finery, had fought on this spot to decide which should have the precedence in taking in hot water for the morning shave!

A really sanguinary resort to arms was necessary to redeem the New Bridge's reputation!

The savagery in Pontgibaut's front, while causing the crowd to doubt that he was a bully, gave fresh food to Chalais' misgivings.

He reasoned that in the same manner as the Duke of Anjou, jealous in his own way, had thought to blight Baroness Sansforain, he might be trying to make away with Chalais, who was not trusted with the design in the whole; who knows if the ever-plotting prince had not a substitute for him and a more pliant tool in the reserve? Chalais knew that a hunting-horn player, yet a page, named Baradas, had been recommended to the king and

his horn might be the cause of Chalais' castle in the air—his Jericho—falling down?

“I shall sell my post dearly!” said he, resolved.

Hence they two were of the same mettle. Chalais inclined to be rash, because circumspect; and the bishop's-knight, precipitate, from being slow to move.

The consequence was that the seconds had hardly placed their men, before the latter thrust, without any too much preliminary, “feeling” the opponent's style fairly together. The Vidame's sword point snapped off a little below the *forte*, having met a button or an amulet suspended to the courtier's neck; such things should be removed, but both had been in haste. Chalais' weapon, on the contrary, bending badly and retaining the curve, entered under the other's arm and he turned to one side, throwing up his arms several times like a fowl, beheaded, flapping its wings. The blood flowed so freely that his shirt was dyed red; the little white left seemed bleached spots. The stroke was fatal.

Porthos had paired off with Rieux, as D'Artagnan with the detested Louvigny; each pair was on a side to guard their principals. But, at this summary outcome, they set to wrangling about the effects and were immediately at swords' play themselves.

“Up to the hilts at once!” chorused the delighted spectators, of the period when bull and bear baiting were popular amusements.

Louvigny wore a sinister look at the best of times, but on this occasion, the eagerness with which he matches

himself with his previous contender, gave the queen's guardsman an idea as Chalais entertained of poor Pontgibaut; that Gaston had continued the command to kill the man who had manifestly foiled him and laid his own hands about his ears. Grammont-Louvigny was capable of this. For this is what he had done.

In a ferocious fight with Hocquincourt (afterwards Marshal of France), he was guilty of an act of horrific cowardice. Being pressed, and rebuked for his bungling, he protested:

„It's these hanged spurs which are in my way! Take off yours and let me remove mine, eh?”

In encounters between men practiced, such excuses for a breathing spell were allowed, with a grain of salt. Hocquincourt lowered his sword, which he held between his teeth, and stooped to undo his spur straps. Louvigny quickly and traitorously charged him from behind and ran his sword through his body. He nearly died of it, and was laid up for half the year. When he was at the worst point of the recovery, his father-confessor besought him to forgive the offender.

“I bear him too sore a grudge,” he returned, “to be too hasty about that! If I die, I forgive him; but if I get healed, I shall return him blow for blow!”

In the meanwhile, all honorable men blamed this perfidy and anyone likely to meet Louvigny was advised to be the victim's avenger.

“I wonder that Count Chalais selected him as second,” Porthos had spoken out.

When D'Artagnan prayed him to let him handle the culprit, on the seconds becoming imitators of the principals, the musketeer assented placidly.

"This is a lad of performance as well as of promise," he said, for the public benefit. "You will see that he will deprive Hocquincourt of his retaliation!"

He was a prophet. The Gascon had no need to keep his battery of invective going to disconcert the serpentine count. Louvigny, having viperous tongue of his own, vied with him in vituperation. This was sweets to the listeners, but shocking to the precisians of the deadly game, and many veterans looked on.

Louvigny, with some worldly knowledge, believed that the sorest point of a freshcomer to town was his rusticity, betrayed longest in tricks of speech. The Gascons, the Scots or Irishmen of France, were thin skinned about their language, boasting that it is primeval, the angelic one in which Adam and Eve dilated on their novel and circumscribed experience in Eden.

"Oh, ho!" exclaimed Louvigny, to please the "gallery," as in disgust at having had a fine thrust neatly parried, the "Black Gascon" broke out with a local oath, his "*Mort dious*" for "Mordieu," of Paris, "we hear a moulder of that jargon which puzzled the devil and in which, when you spell 'Sol-o-mon,' you must pronounce it 'Nebuchadnezzar.'"

The welkin rang with laughter. This encounter was good as a play at the stalls.

"I do not know that it is more singular," returned

D'Artagnan, playing the sword as he spoke, "than for Parisians to write 'Poltroon,' and mean 'Louvigny!'"

As the laughter became bitter and was thrown entirely upon the unfair fighter, he redoubled his ferocity. He had the last failure to make up, and he was confident that the Prince of Anjou would fill his cap with silver pieces, who brought news that the man who made him slap his face, was dead.

So the two worked away as never seen among even the duels since 1590 to 1600, in which period, according to a table ciphered out for the prime minister to pass a law upon, four thousand nobles and gentlemen had lost their lives on the field of honor.

Meanwhile, Porthos had ripped up Rieux's sleeve and, as the latter thought more of his fine clothes than his skin, unlike Louvigny, he held up his sword to intimate that he was conquered.

Porthos lowered his point and bowed to him. He respected a man who probably had not a long credit at his tailor's, and the doublet was trimmed with miniver.

Besides, Rieux was simply an "Aversionist," because it suited his policy to have friends in the Anjou camp. Porthos allowed two citizens to help him into his coat, a feat, since they had to step upon a horse block, and they puffed and blowed to the amusement of the crowd. The musketeer turned red also, for he thought some one might dare to make mirth at him; but the sound of a heavy fall and the "ough!" of a man having his breath knocked out, diverted his attention.

It was Louvigny who seemed as dead as Pontgibaut.

“That Gascon's steel went through him like a cheese taster through a Pont-Levesque cheese!” remarked Rieux, delighted that he had been taken on by the mustketeer, and not by this waspish little guardsman.”

The fallen count lifted one arm and felt in the air for a friend. Not a hand was extended, so deep was the odium upon him as a false fighter. An odd prayer oozed from his paling lips:

“O God! Is there no God for the rich as there is for the poor?”

Again, no one softened at this original plea. But for shame, Chalais turned towards the dying one. His friends had been urging him to make off, but he had refused, relying on immunity as being the king's leaning post.

But he was preceded by a man who glided out of the throng, which made way for him with that quickness shown by the masses for the dispensers of curative and spiritual powers.

It was a monk in orders gray.

That is to say, he was that Capuchin or Franciscan who saw more or less of the throwing of the horse tripper, causing D'Artagnan's implication in the affair of the dreadful night.

This holy man fell on his knees beside the wounded count. Then rising he made the sign with his hand that the friends, servants or others should take up the hopeless case. He shook his head lugubriously.

As the brothers in holy communion were surgical au-

thorities, only two footmen came up, out of pure duty, to carry off the sufferer, who was little better than Pontgibaut. They took him to the barber's, who had the most of the custom of this nature.

The sign of wood on an ornate iron frame, creaking slightly, not unlike a rook for its prey, was "Goldilocks." By the picture one could associate this name with the princess imprisoned in a castle who let down her plentiful tresses so that her lover could arrive at the turret top. The painter had thrown a doubt over the natural ornament by repeating under the picture the word: "Wigs!" three times. It would appear, therefore, that the hairdresser sought the custom of those gentlemen who wore off their hair with helmets, as well as the tender sex's.

"Master," said Planchet to the guardsman, "I know him! it is the Capuchin who prowled about the Louvre the time the king came forth and—you know the second chapter!"

The young man studied the monk; his large, bony hands showed great strength of wrist out of the flowing sleeves of coarse cloth; a full, black beard worthy of an Oriental issued from the cowl; deep-set eyes glowed fervently and, to go to the other extremity, his well-kept feet, apparently his only foppery, showed white and trimmed in stout sandals. These eyes were a man's "born with them wide open."

They denounced him to the guardsman, who said in a half-loud voice:

"Why, it is Father Joseph!"

At the same time also recognizing this feature of the court end of Paris, many said with awe and yet some kindness, for he was a steward of the Lord:

“The Gray Cardinal!”

If the bystanders had stood afar from Louvigny in spite of humanity, they stepped still farther on seeing into whose charge he had fallen. They followed to the barber's shop, but refrained from assisting the footmen to bear him within.

Louvigny dying inspired no less repulsion than in life; the Capuchin inspired deference.

Deposited on a window recess settee, under a wall adorned with prints of heroes, battles, fires and freaks, which took the place of the later illustrated newspaper, Louvigny opened his eyes. But on seeing the priest, he shut them, muttering faintly:

“The ghostly comforter? Then, it is fatal!”

The two servants, regrettable to say, wanted to treat their master, all but no more, as the camp followers treat the disabled on the battlefield; they departed disconsolate, afraid of the reverend. They ranged themselves at the doorway, much like the mutes posted at a dead room egress by the undertaker.

The barber, as became a barber, knew all Paris; he bowed to his visitor and held out his hands open, which signifies that he was no longer master here, but offered him all to the tufts of wool with which he wiped off the lather, paper scraps not being common.

He had not looked at the wound; by other signs he judged it was a hopeless matter.

“Ah, if religion has power to *assoil* him?” said he, making the sign of the cross to correct his doubt.

“Then, you know——”

“It is that scrape penny, the Count of Louvigny,” replied the barber, backing to the inner room, where he shut himself up. He evidently suspected that his shop would be the arena for the struggle of the holy man with the prince of evil, the only prince he faithfully served, over his condemned soul.

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CHAPTER X.

A VIPER DYING EXUDES VENOM.

In popular parlance, there were three cardinals in town: the Red, being the Duke of Richelieu; the Gray, being Father Joseph, his inseparable ecclesiastical attendant and believed to be that coadjutant who has in his sleeve full power to replace his principal in case the latter departs from a course laid down to him by a superior; and the Black, being Gondi, coadjutor of the Archbishop of Paris.

Gondi was a cloud which rained alms; Joseph was one containing, no one knew what definitely; and Richelieu, a cloud threatening thunderbolts.

St. Germain's bells and St. Roch's agreed with remarkable unison to sound the time together.

This must have struck the dying man painfully, for once more he opened his eyes, less lively than before. He saw the monk still beside him, doing nothing even to stanch the blood, if there were any left to flow.

"God of the rich and the noble!" gasped he, "succor the Grammonts!"

"Curious faith!" thought Joseph. "These are a hard class to subdue! There must be some connection between the head and the heart, as was said in a treatise, at Douai; for, thrusting at the ribs, his brains are damaged."

But, in fact, before being wounded the last time, Louvigny who saw his great hope, from D'Artagnan's im-

petuosity, vanishing, had burst a vessel in the head. As a miser, he had hoped to find gold in an ingot; as a rake, he had hoped to achieve a name for temerity. In both he was wrecked. For a miser dying, is losing his hoard; as a defeated swordsman, his fame was tarnished—Hocquincourt apart.

He knew his consoler, who did not yet console. Now, whether he took him to be merely Richelieu's chief spy or planted beside him by Rome to see that he carried out the orders from there, he hoped not relief but the joy of reprisal in his possible aid.

In the silence, they could hear the hard but suppressed breathing of the curious, who flattened their ears against the window panes of oiled paper, to prevent too much being seen of the mysteries of the tonsor's art.

"Oh, I am going to trust you," babbled Louvigny, letting one idea master him. "But did I not hear your al-fresco sermon at the Innocents' Cross? You are an Ebnite; you believe that only the poor can be saved. Send me another, who includes all in the promise!"

"Dismiss worldly thoughts!" and then, with inconsistency, but knowing his man, he went on: "Is your will made? I promise it shall be carried out to a dot."

"My will is that the family shall have all I leave! They will requite Mother Church! But bend down—strange, I am speaking, am I not? yet I do not hear myself speaking—and yet I heard you!"

Joseph had nodded without a word.

"Will you carry out my last advice?"

Joseph still did not speak but he patted the man on the head, as one appeases a fretful dog.

“You know the cardinal?”

Joseph smiled as he would say: “Who knows Richelieu?”

“He would demolish our castles—would he disserve the nobility?”

“Richelieu wishes to found a line of princes!”

This flat rejoinder was heard by the moribund, who smiled feebly. But his voice was slightly stronger as he proceeded:

“A worldly prelate!” he sneered:

“No; it is for his family! they educated him, sent him to Rome, handsomely supported when his struggles were lonely—he enriches them! He himself——” he paused, but reflecting that he was addressing the almost dead, he added, plainly:

“He wishes to be *all*, like all priests!”

“The pope? Oh, there is no harm in that! I, too, wish to live to see a Frenchman pope! Good! I will help him to overthrow the enemies who would frustrate that! The Spanish woman would never suffer that innovation!”

In this expression of hate against the Austrian princess, he lost consciousness. With great precaution, and not letting the barber see his act, Joseph took out of one of the folds of his robe, which served as pocket, a small phial bound in silver: he touched his finger to the mouth, after removing the stopper, and with this slight moisture bedewed the unfortunate’s brow, side of the eyes and back

of the ears. The effect was magical considering the wretch's weakened state.

Understanding that he had no time and that this return was transient, Louvigny, fortified by his spite, pursued :

“To Grammont House! Show Butler Augey this ring.” Joseph detached it from the finger so as to leave nothing undone. “He will give you the reliquary of St. Rogier, confided to him by me. A glance! you will see that its contents will destroy them all: Chalais, Anjou, all, all! But, oh! help me! absolve! O God of the rich, spare the Grammonts!”

Joseph, being of good blood, did not sneer at this pride of place. He murmured a prayer, refrained from absolution, no avail, since Louvigny was sounding the death rattle; but he shrank, though inured to such scenes, to see the diabolical smile of pleasure with which the double traitor set his features at the last.

The monk rose and called the barber with a low voice. If he had not called, the other would have come in, disappointed over the whole having passed so tranquilly, to what he awaited.

“This was a sinner,” said the man in gray, “but he has, let us trust, passed into safety by making amends for his wickedness. He has found that there is but one God, over all, the rich and the poor. Let his men carry him to Grammont House, since the dead must not enter the royal dwelling, where he lived. I will hurry thither to prepare the mourning relatives!”

The barber laid out the dead.

“I believe the monk despoiled him!” thought he; “he wore a ring with a brilliant in it, like the Valois diamonds in the regalia! Now, these varlets will have noted that, too; and they, cheated themselves, will say that I robbed him! and I dare not decry the gray eminence!”

As Joseph pushed through the crowd, he saw that all the known figures had disappeared. Not even a dog that had known him, followed the discredited Louvigny.

A few words on the Caupchin’s head, as he proceeds for his breaking the news.

Out of his confraternity, he bore the name of Francis Leclerc Tremblay. Born in Paris in 1577, he was but a simple priest when sent by his superiors into Poitou. Richelieu came into touch with him as his bishop, of Luçon, where he already looked for recruits in case he entered on a campaign.

His inspection approving of the reverend father, he advanced him gradually into his confidence as far as he allowed any man. If Joseph surprised him by having more insight than he had vouchsafed, he had to overlook that as long as he was well served.

At the crucial point, when the old queen (Marie de Medicis) widow of Henry IV., was practically at war with her son, her minister was the Duke of Epernon, in the same way as young Louis was advised by Albert Luynes.

Richelieu saw that while one may conquer by dividing, one requires another course to rule. He will always be

found following the rising tide—the younger generation. Even at this hour of the prince's minority he divined that he would be the holdfast until he could slip the cable and attach himself to another buoy.

It was necessary, therefore, to consider the queen mother, a dead obstacle, and remove all from the path of the boy king.

He prompted Brother Joseph to go find Epernon and counsel peace and filling up the breach. Luynes, as the royal favorite, had pledged that the reward for this reconciliation should be the cardinal's hat to the pacifier of the vindictive Florentine and the greedy Epernon.

The two chiefs of parties in accord, it was imperative to join mother and son. Richelieu became the "arranger," now; he acted towards the astute duke as if he saw in him the sole minister for France, and engaged him to hand a letter from the queen's son to her.

It concluded: "Pray believe that this (the reconciliation) is my will, and that the bearer will do me the utmost pleasure in carrying it out!"

The queen made the bishop of Luçon her chancellor; thereupon, so that he had official rank as intermediary. On his report, the king went to Montbazou Castle, at Tours, Courrière, where the widow was awaiting.

"How lusty you have grown since I last saw you, son!" she said.

"The better to serve you!" was his answer.

They embraced as mother and child should do after a couple of years' parting.

This harmony silenced the murmur of civil war, buzzing when Queen Marie escaped from Blois Castle, as being plainly a prison, into Angoulême, where her forces should gather.

The young sovereign was bound to be beholden to the negotiator who prevented renewed splits in the realm, driven in the preceding reigns by religious strife.

He chose Richelieu, not Epernon, to be his chief adviser. Father Joseph, disclaiming any worldly reward, merely suggested that his brother, Francis, should be governor of the Bastile, State prison. As to which Marais, the royal jester, observed that Father Joseph and his brother held the keys of purgatory and redemption.

In a man of this consequence, it will not be thought that he had time to hang about the palace gates after nightfall to see the king go forth, but he may have expected such little hindrances as caltrops, and it was not merely to pass a Louvigny towards salvation that he attended his dying bed.

As well as his greater colleague, he knew what conspiracies were hatching. He guessed that sooner or later a royal favorite must dabble in the pitch—the bird lime, more accurately—which seekers for the scepter lay liberally about a palace.

Joseph was an archspy; the European one; under pretense of preaching another crusade, at first, when younger and more fiery, against the Turks, he now held up the Black Eagles, of Austria, as “the great red dragon.” Under this standard, he stalked for his patron and possibly

for his own game bag. He had begun like a begging monk, on foot; then mounted an ass, which, unlike Balaam's, never told tales, and, lastly, had a coach when he cared.

But in every hostile move, he scented the perfume which Gaston diffused: that prince had hated his brother ever since King Louis had had his tutor, Marshal Ornano, imprisoned in Vincennes, where he died mysteriously. He felt sure that his brother ordered this, at the stimulation of Richelieu, whom he called "shaveling," to be shaved under the chin, in plain speech, have his throat cut.

Joseph had shuddered at this, being a clerk of holy orders himself, and abhorring brutality.

Chalais, as a king's man, had adopted in all its heat, the court animosity to Cardinal Richelieu.

"He in a cardinal's red hat? Rather the pitch cap, and I could set it on!" had said the dainty favorite.

Add to this, Chalais' still more disloyal threat to poison the king with the body linen he handed him as gentleman of the wardrobe, and Joseph believed that Louvigny's revenge would include Prince Gaston and Chalais.

At least, the dying scoundrel had uttered truth at the finale: there was a casket which the butler placed in the priest's power; and, in the simultaneous arrival of the bearers of the dead lord, no one paid heed to the unconquerable smile of triumph with which the good father took his leave quietly.

Under a Virgin statue in a street shrine, there was a praying recess for the devout. Joseph went into it, and

scanned the contents of the papers in the reliquary. He knew what these lines did not make clear.

“Chalais has escaped the gentleman’s sword to-day!” moralized he, “but he cannot the headsman’s! Chalais is lost!”

CHAPTER XI.

A TOO-WELL-BELOVED QUEEN.

When, about 1615, the young King of France was espoused to the Infanta of Spain, Donna Anne, of Austria, daughter of King Philip III., he was already mistrustful; not only did he attach no faith to ambassadors' reports but he doubted the court portrait painter! So he could not have paid a greater compliment to his bride than in saying that she was far above all description.

As their united ages, at their official wedding, amounted but to twenty-eight years, the boy could not be expected to betray much virility, but before they met again, in two years, he had instigated the murder of Marshal of Ancre and otherwise showed that he would not stoop his crest to the proud Spanish woman. Though feeble he had indomitable spells of violence, and it was dangerous sport to arouse him from his sullen moods.

It would seem that the queen-mother incited her younger son to make his elder jealous. The youth was as gay and light as the other was morose and moping. But in playing on jealousy, it is meddling with fire in the ashes.

Whether mere rumors, petty tales or calumny built on some base, Anne seemed to follow the unwise step of her mother-in-law by rousing the connubial pride of her incompatible consort: she flirted, as we would say now, with

so many of the courtiers who eagerly flew at the lure, after the manner of those favorites, like Essex and Leicester, who adore the queen for her support in the race for the seals and the mace.

The enumeration of her courtiers is appalling. And to make it worse for her, each person on whom she momentarily cast a pleasing glance became, on finding it impossible to catch her eye again, an inveterate foe.

So Count Rochefort fought on her behalf with Count Rivarol and was only pronounced forbidding when he returned to court with a scar on the temple received for her sake. This turned Rochefort to assist anyone whom she similarly discarded, and the chief among them was Cardinal Richelieu.

So, it became a kind of proverb that the queen was different from other beauties in that all her ex-lovers were as full of hate to her as they were hateful to her.

With this art of making enemies, she never, for a long time, won over her husband.

Yet, if we believe the history of her times, Anne possessed personally all the charms to satiate even royal exigencies.

Accomplished for a lover, perfect as a queen from the subjects' point of view, she had the majestic beauty which inspired affection and respect in the turbulent nobles surrounding her.

Tall and well shaped, her hands were the fairest and comeliest that ever beckoned a suitor to beseech or impelled a soldier to die for her. Her blue eyes were prone

to enlarge and had a greenish change which gave them wondrous transparency. The mouth was small and vermilion red, so that the poets sought other comparison than the well-worn rosebud. Her long and silky hair had that lively warm hue which gives to the countenances it enframes the softness of the blonds and the animation of the dark complexioned.

In 1622 Richelieu obtained the cardinal's hat, and at the same time that he was joyous, the king fell ill.

"What makes the king so pale?" inquired the court.

"Because the leech (Richelieu) has drawn out all his red to dye his hat!"

The king's illness made Anjou rise into notice. The royal counselor must have suggested that the queen should not reprove Duke Gaston for his somewhat too pointed attentions, for, in case of death, he would be the monarch.

"Do you mean to tell me that Dr. Bouvard pronounced the king's ail as mortal?" she demanded, trying to pierce the already well-schooled lineaments of the plotter.

"Let us be precise," returned the other, "for I must not inspire your majesty with premature dread. Bouvard does not say that the king's health is shattered, but that the illness is of the deadly kind."

He spoke the words so truthfully, and the grim tidings so closely tied with what she had heard a thousand times, that she could not help sighing and frowning.

Perceiving that he had led her into the susceptible mood, the minister went on, warily, for the queen's Spanish

woman, Donna Estefania, was hovering around: "Does not your majesty sometimes ponder on the state of things if the king were no more?"

Her face was more and more clouded.

"This court holds your majesty as a foreigner, and it is peopled with enemies! There is the queen dowager, whose enmity is always ready to explode."

"I beg to ask why she should detest me?"

"A woman asks such a question? You are her rival in power, as she can no longer be one in beauty and youth."

"The mother hates me, I allow; but the family upholds me."

"The royal family, the chief of which is the Duke of Anjou. A stripling of fifteen, and more childish than any other at fifteen. A chicken heart and a peacock's brain. Where all the desires come to nothing because he has no courage, though overmuch ambition. Such a gilded reed would bend, nay, break, at the resting on it."

He was frank with her; never would he trust to Gaston; so Gaston and he would never be friends.

"Is there anyone in such a crotch whom I could rest upon? Could I turn to your eminence?"

This was frank of her, too.

"Yes, you can, majesty, if I am not carried away by the torrent. Gaston hates me. He is the spoiled darling of Queen Marie; she will sway this doll of wax, and she has never forgiven me for having shown your majesty tokens of sympathy. If the king dies without lineal heirs,

we are both lost. I shall be sent into my diocese and your majesty back to Spain."

Anne shuddered. Spanish royal etiquette condemns a widowed queen to dwell ever in the cloister, since she would bemean herself to wed any but a king.

It was a sad perspective to one brought up to expect royalty, and, perhaps, a regency to be hers.

As her duenna was slyly peeping, Anne answered, with devoutness :

"Like other men's, the fate of kings is in higher hands."

The churchman also bowed to this, but quickly appended :

"The ancients were as pious to their gods as we to ours, but it was said among them that in trouble one should put the shoulder to the wheel. Now, to guard yourself, let the king's will thus read :

" 'During the interregnum awaiting a monarch, let the kingdom be governed by the queen as regent, with the chief of the council of state to be the Cardinal of Richelieu, and the lieutenancy general to be whom your majesty pleases.' "

Anne begged a moment to study this proposition. In the inner room she spied a substitute for the Spaniard, who had retired, seeing how grave had become this interview. It was the queen's friend, the Duchess of Chevreuse, who replaced her as watch.

The duchess gave the queen a sign ; for the moment she was to assent to anything.

So Anne replied that she would be ruled by this counselor to her predecessor and the king at present reigning.

“Only,” said she, archly, with the humor now and then piercing her constraint through etiquette, “I fear I shall little change my jailer—the dull king will be followed by a grave, sedate church dignitary.”

To the amaze of both hearers, the minister burst out into a peal of the hearty laughter only heard, it is true, in his study. Then he had his cronies about him and was playing with his kittens.

“Save your majesty,” replied he, with a merry voice, “I am a cavalier and gentleman before being a churchman. I do not pretend to jest like your buffoon, or to make sprightly rhymes like your poet, but I can caper as did our good Henry IV., when he ought to have been sedate for a sovereign, as I for a prelate.”

“You dance? A cardinal dance?” continued the queen, in the same vein, urged on by her confidante’s signs and nods.

If ever a man who never showed youth, looked young, it was now, at this meeting halfway. Richelieu, becoming young again, looked a deal more gallant than a cardinal ought to do and more obliging than ministers are usually to queens.

Her uncommonly haughty expression had melted to a kindly smile.

“By the shrine of Compostella,” said she, “if you will dance a *saraband* before me, I will agree to obtain the insertion of that line in the royal testament, if I can.”

“Nothing is impossible to such a queen as you,” said

the delighted premier, who kissed her hand and went away, believing he had won his point.

The queen, however, did not believe that the statesman would commit such a piece of absurdity.

“He would do worse, for he is in love with your majesty,” said the Duchess of Chevreuse.

“Brienne’s Memoires” prove that the cardinal no more shrank from dancing before the queen than the still graver and more sedate Sully, treasurer to King Henry IV., to amuse his friends; but, as the two women and one or two confidantes made a joke of it, the dancer went away in danger.

They laughed, then, at the anger of the Red Cardinal. But they would not have laughed, either of them, if they could have measured the wrath of Anne and Richelieu.

The court had its laugh, and the queen hers, and the latter cherished but a faint remembrance.

The king recovered, thanks to the assiduity of his body physician, and his first resumption of private business was to tighten the bars around his captive partner’s cage.

He was too stingy to gild them, too.

But if the Black Sluggard did not lessen her distaste for him thereby, still less did she lean towards “Barbarossa,” her brother-in-law.

She was too lofty to become a cat’s-paw to schemers; she looked for some less dishonorable outcome to these frettings than her union with this confirmed traitor, tergiversator and willing fratricide.

Her isolation increased; the more she adhered to her

Spanish suite and to the strict faith of hard and firm bigots, the more this state alarmed her.

The Duchess of Chevreuse was excellent company, but dangerous. The only Frenchman, after her finding those with whom she established intimacy at the first, on cordial terms was Laporta, her gentleman-in-waiting, neither fertile in expedients or bellicose to carry others' ideas into execution—he was simply “Old Honesty.”

Her *cameristas*, stubborn in religion and resolved not to learn anything in this strange country, were of no utility out of her reach.

Doubting that, Lady Chevreuse after all clung to her but to profit herself and her family, she gradually dropped threads with the royal family as hostile at heart. The Duke of Anjou had bound to him his and the king's half-brothers, the avowed sons of Henry IV. The trio against her was Gaston, Cæsar Vendome and Alexander, his brother.

In the game of “puss in the corner,” they filled three, and the cardinal, whom she had made her life enemy, probably, would take the fourth; she would be in the open, without a place.

She much regretted having perpetrated that practical joke of causing the sage adviser to dance at her piping; she was inclined to blame the mirthful Lady Chevreuse for it.

She had been cautioned from home and from Italy that the ex-counselor of Queen Marie would be her best counselor, too, in many crises.

Again, to conclude with her aversions, there was Chalais, hated as queens hate all other favorites of their kings, for sweeping into his pockets the royal consort's perquisites: jewels, gifts, offices, presents, favors.

Chalais' daily association with the king made him an indispensable prop to any plot of the Gastonets. To strike him aside was to make him fall and others stagger and seek a fresh support.

Lady Chevreuse, who lost no tittle of the court tattle, informed her of the Chalais duel. On learning that a youth in her own guards was concerned, that same who had defended her guests on the evil night, she learned something more of him through his immediate Capt. Guitaut.

It was not likely that the confessor had let out the drift of the papers he took from Grammont House, but something oozed to give the queen an inkling.

It was plain that Gaston could do nothing while Richelieu was friend of the king, especially as the latter was his safeguard.

Queen Anne, without consulting anybody, determined to save the premier.

He might forgive the *saraband* prank if he was duly grateful.

The cloak was at hand.

She called in her senior captain, Desessarts, brother-in-law of Capt. Treville.

"My friend," began she, with sweetness, for she had found him and Guitaut, his next officer, soldier-like in

fair dealing, "I believe that this duel on the public thoroughfare, in which Count Louvigny lost his life, through a cadet of Gascony, who figured in the rescue of Lady Sansforain from those lordly *ladrones*, is attached to that mournful affair."

"By M. D'Artagnan figuring handsomely in both," returned the guard's commander, proud of his recruit.

"It reminds me, therefore, of that poor, young widow, in a retreat at Fleury, shadowed in her opening bloom, cut off from society. Oh, I thought from her handwriting resembling mine, only better, and her acquaintance with Spanish, that she would have made me an excellent corresponding dame."

"It is never too late; and I believe that she would be deeply obliged to your majesty for shortening her term of mourning," said Desessarts, gallantly.

"I hear that the young lady is pining."

"Having had a glimpse of your majesty and this gay court, I'll be bound that she pines."

"I promised her very different experience when I was her godmother."

"Beside a convent, the Louvre should be a vale of content. Let us try again to bring her into the palace, and, I warrant it, this time, if I may have the selection of her escort, she shall enter your presence without a lace tippet ruffled," and he curled his mustache defiantly.

"That is sure, if you have a file of those D'Artagnans."

“Thank you for the knight; Guitaut, then, and twenty like my good boy, Louis D’Artagnan.”

“That is my wish. Detach them and send them down to Fleury, to bring her hither, poor thing! Let the guards be ample, since she must have no apprehension that the event will be repeated that left a bloody bar across her road.”

“I do not think those brigands will waylay again after the lesson impressed by my young spark.”

“Oh, they might rise in greater force.”

“Hem!”—seeing that there was an underorder to the order. “I can double the force.”

She unbent her brows at being divined.

“The fact is, down at this same Fleury dwells in his indisposition the king’s chief counselor.”

“Ah, my Lord Duke of Richelieu?”

“He labors too hard for the good of the church and the good—humph! good of the realm.” Desessarts did not show the ghost of a smile, though one ought not to let a royal jest pass unsaluted. “He is not a strong man, and his ailments——”

“Bah! an astrologer says that the king will outlive him by but little, and the king is of the reserved, wiry sort, which lives for ever and a day beyond the sappy and lusty.”

But, seeing that his lady did not relish this allusion to superstition, more generally believed than mocked at, the captain went on, rapidly: “Madam, there are some men constituted to bear ills as we soldiers bear armor. We be-

gin early and become habituated to the added inflictions daily. I wish I were as sure to be in command ten years hence as the duke of his prime ministry. Death of my life! he is in his prime, and gout, though it may rack, is like those cunning torturers who know when the rack has been wound up to human endurance, and let go, to be freshly applied thereafter. Of all the seats of longevity, give me the cushion of the chief of the royal council."

"I lose all reliance on you, Desessarts, since you become a politician," laughed the lady. "But I was about to say——"

"When, unlike a politician, but truly a soldier, I interrupted your majesty; but, hang it! I am sinning again."

"You have my absolution in advance. It happens that at this same Fleury, the cardinal-minister has his country seat, where he recovers from his attack. Now, I do not want it to be said that I sent a numerous armed force into his immediate neighborhood to disturb his rest——"

"The horses shall be shod in felt; the swords tied to the scabbard, and none shall speak above bated breath," said Desessarts, preternaturally solemnly.

"Ah, but how shoe in felt, how tie the hunting swords up and how make the hunting party speak in whispers?"

"What hunting party, please your majesty?" asked the soldier, surprised.

She enjoyed his ignorance, it not often happening that she had the first piece of intelligence.

"Hunters? Of what? They dare not hunt his emi-

nence, though I know his red hat irritates some as the same hue the bull.”

“At Fleury, or, at least, hard by, the Duke of Montbazon allows a hunting meet on his grounds.”

“Well, the duke is too much of a gentleman to let the horns and baying of hounds annoy the brother duke, though of later creation.”

“The duke allows the meet to take place there, but he has not left town. He resigns to let Prince Gaston be the entertainer of the party; the more proper as they are Anjou’s own invited ones.”

“Oh, oh, oh!” said Desessarts, showing by the gamut rising that he comprehended.

“You see by the noisy ways of his friends in Paris; what must they be in the country?”

“Oh, yes, they would not refrain from blowing horns, setting the dogs to give tongue and letting the grooms shout their lungs sore. With the prince to set the key, certainly our poor invalid will have his head—God bless my blundering tongue!—his rest broken! I think, majesty, that fifty men might be of the escort in case we meet the noisy hunters on the road.”

“They would pester my lord, out of pure fun.”

“They would give him a morning serenade with whistles, snapping whips and clashing of hunting knives. I know the pets incarnate. To sound the tallyho, the rally and the death under his sick-room windows would be truffles on their toast.”

Anne smiled meaningly.

"After this late outrage giving the wretches ill odor, they would all be glad to self-exile themselves. I should not wonder if Anjou had a hundred gentlemen to join him in the woods."

"A hundred," repeated Desessarts, gravely. "Yes, it will need a little army, for they will have their servants with them, little better than bravoes and slash-bucklers. This promises to be finer than that triple duel on the bridge."

He coughed, and slyly added:

"If your majesty could give me leave, I should like to go along."

"Unfortunately, while my guards can go and bring back that young goddaughter of mine," said the queen, with a solemn voice, but her eyes twinkling drolly, "I must not launch them forward to prevent my lord cardinal being awakened too early."

"Oh!"

"Yes, a few men will suffice to guard M. D'Artagnan bearing my letter to release Lady Sansforain from her convent."

"Oh, a few!"

"You see that this must not be the queen's, but the king's affair. The queen hindering Anjou from plaguing the king's counselor? Fie! What does she in that galley? Now, the king's guards shielding his minister—what more seemly!"

"It is seemly enough," admitted Desessarts, sadly.

"Another time, then, for your evidence of bravery and

generalship, my dear captain. Meanwhile, you have but to breathe a word to your brother of the royal musketeers——”

“Treville?”

“Capt. Treville. Surely, at present, he regularly supplies the cardinal with a detachment of musketeers——”

“On the face of it, he supplies them,” granted the guards’ officer, with a dry smile.

“So, it is fully within his duty to dispatch a reinforcement to Fleury, without becoming identified with my own escort going to bring Lady Sansforain to town, they protect the prime minister. What more natural?”

“I defy the spitefullest slanderer of the palace to say there is anything unnatural in that.”

“Then, the musketeers will fend off those hunters of the——the——”

“I take it they aim at the red boar.”

The queen laughed.

CHAPTER XII.

IN WHICH D'ARTAGNAN HOPES THE SECOND INVITATION WILL INDUCE A LONGER STAY THAN THE FIRST.

"It is a very good and womanly thought of your majesty," Desessarts took the liberty to remark, about to go forth, "for I am sure that the young lady will remember more clearly the radiant face of our young champion in the glow of battle than her husband's, cold in death."

"He shall bear the invitation," replied the queen. "I shall have it written, and I am to see him so that I may confide it to him by my own hand."

"He will defend it, then, so closely that I defy the best spies of the Duke of Anjou to read a line of it."

Desessarts went out, a little crossed that he should not lead a command to oppose the prince of the realm, for he had an idea that both his brother and himself would never be promoted under his new rule.

"However," thought he, "this is a good thing for our little lion cub. So far he has not been run through by any of the Anjou faction, but this cannot be for long. It is true that, by taking this tour, he will be again up against the same set, but I am not afraid of that kind of fighting. It is the cutthroats in the dark that I fear."

When he saw the involuntary smile break out on the Gascon's lips on hearing that he was to see Lady Sansforain once more, and under warrant of the queen's mis-

sive, the worthy commander was sure that the widow need not be long remarrying if she did not disdain a subaltern in the queen's guards. The little corps was pleased to have the country saunter with a collision with their old enemies in the prospect, while Guitaut took all in, as a page in the day book; D'Artagnan would have seemed going to be appointed a musketeer, his ambition.

But he was not yet desirous of cutting loose from his present quarters. Guitaut and Desessarts both regarded their mistress as the pivot of the intrigues. The future of royalty dwelt in her. If ever she were to be mother of the next monarch, she must be loyally and manfully defended, however statesmen and princes warred.

"Guitaut," said the senior to Guitaut, on apprising him of his errand with its side and secret "rider," "it is amusing, but we are going to defend the prime man of the state. He is no longer the incubus, to the queen, at least."

The younger soldier was taciturn. He fought as told and for what end never worried him.

"Do this mission dexterously, for there is more in it than meets the eye. You will be supported by the musketeers, for I am going to consult Capt. Treville to induce him to preside over the expedition."

Guitaut had taken a fancy for his youngest sub-officer, and he called him to him.

"Louis," said he, "have you been tormented since your second crossing with the Gaston party?"

"I have had quarrels picked with me; but, somehow,

I got out without anything serious coming. The fact is, when a man, by luck, has gone through such a combat of thirty to one, as in defense of the young widow, why, no one presses him against the wall."

"I do not doubt that the Duke of Anjou would wear roses on the day of your death."

"That would not matter—his hostility—but I do not know where to elude it. He seems to have friends everywhere in and out of France."

"You prefer the pan to the coals. Perhaps you are right. When I was younger"—Guitaut always spoke of himself as if fourscore—"if I were pursued in the street, which always fretted me, I used to turn a corner, wait and fall upon those who thought they were going to catch up and fall on me."

"I presume they were private foes. Now, I am enemy to the princes of the royal house, for the Bourbons hold with Gaston, like crabapples, all on bough."

"The easier to cut them all off at a blow," returned the other, grimly. "Only stand from under. The steel cap is going out. Well it may, for I would rather wear the cardinal's cap than a steel morion when such apples fall."

"To be short with it, you do me a favor in selecting me to accompanying you into the country, where, it appears, we are going to lend aid to the cardinal."

"No, no, to lend a hand to the musketeers, whose business it is to protect the royal minister."

"Really, while I am ready to die for the king and the

queen, I am not so eager to sacrifice the last of the Artagnans to a duke of to-day, and a priest."

"You forget that he is a priest in a red gown; now, it is not only more potent as mantle for the wearer, but it is large enough to cover him who stands beside him. Hence, to trample on Richelieu, drags the protection off the king, and we cannot allow that."

"In a few words, we go down to Fleury to fortify the cardinal's summer resort?"

"For that, and another matter or two."

"Is it thought that the plotters would harm the king's adviser?"

"Why not, if he advises against them all? Besides, one of the Vendomes is grand prior of France, so that he could grant grace to the slayer of the prelate, not so far above him. I should not lose much if I wagered that the plot is more of the two Bourbons than Gaston, and more of Chalais for his own pocket than for his new prince."

"I do not think you are tender with Chalais; he is brave."

"Oh, the Talleyrands are all brave. As well praise the hound that hunts and the dog that retrieves—it is in the blood. But all these favorites are alike—selfish, and without more gratitude than I could scrape up on my thumb. This count would not only look on while they rolled the minister away, and the king as well, in a horse-blanket and carried them off to some place of security; but he would lift up the flap so that the cutthroats could stab. Ah, catch me letting my favorite be my barber, as

Louis XI. did, or my shoemaker, as Henry IV. did, for the one would maim me and the other lame me—all out of their innate lack of gratitude.”

“Chalais is too dainty to be brutal with the prelate?”

“Think that? Then you will swallow water for Rhenish. But wait! Our errand, if I do not mistake, will lead to the pretty count’s nose being put out! We are not only going to Fleury to assist the musketeers to shelter the cardinal, but—but did not some one tell you?”

“What? I have no confidants here. As soon as the queen’s Spanish attendants suspected from my being their neighbor as a Gascon, that I could understand Spanish, they gave me the cold shoulder. To be sure, their shoulders are bony and high, so that cold or warm, they did not interest me. But, alas! I know nothing.”

“Not that you are to request the fair widow of that poor Baron Sansforain to return to the court and to stay, this time, at the queen’s pleasure?”

D’Artagnan acted as though no hint had come from the superior.

“Well, you are to be the bearer of a letter to request her return; a pretty honor to have me and a troop to escort you, as bearer of a queen’s letter.”

“What honor?”

“What rapture? you young hypocrite! Ah, these Gascons! But, since the lady in weeds does not interest you, though you fought for her, let another carry the letter, and have her company back to town. I could appoint——”

“Capt. Guitaut, you go too far. I cling to the honor of carrying the letter. I confess that I desire the farther one of escorting that beauty back to court. But,” and his brow clouded, “the queen would not reinvite her to ensnare the king, would she?”

“Ensnare a stuffed image? This is a true princess, our Lady Anne.”

The young man knew that Guitaut thus early betrayed an exaggerated devotion to his mistress.

“So much the better. No influence can warp that divine creature from the right—no specious reasonings train her. There will always be kings and queens——”

“And favorites.”

“But only such nonpareil now and then.”

“I see that one day your page will be carrying a letter to this dame of your heart as you are carrying the queen’s to her now.”

“Oh, you all see too much, including the queen.”

“Young sir, make yourself distinguished in the queen’s service. They often repay such services by giving their hand to kiss and another hand to be united to the servitor’s.”

“What, do you know?”

“I foretell. Well, you do not ask leave, but you accompany us to Fleury, though you will probably meet a dozen to twenty of the Gastonets in our march.”

“I am loath to believe that they would attack a sick man in his bed.”

“Do you want to see that? After Louvigny, I should

think you could believe in cowardice. Among his kind, at all events. Pho!"

"Captain," said the young soldier, lowering his voice, "this time I shall have to come to end with it. A man cannot last who has a prince of the blood his foe. I am only carrying a letter, you will say, but as that letter is to the first woman who escaped the prince's clutches, it is my death warrant, if I run foul of him."

"I grant it. A man who makes a prince box his own ears!"

D'Artagnan's punishment of the head of Anjou, had greatly rejoiced all Paris, and the soldiers most of all.

"All is known, you see. If I encounter the duke, it must be he or I."

"Bah! The king will pardon you for removing his burden. Not only did he reward the slayers of Marshal Ancre, but he egged them on."

"Oh, I do not want royal sanction or incentive to strike, if to defend my skin."

"I do not know whether I do well to you or to him by taking you out of Paris; but——"

"A letter from the queen, to be borne to its destination by M. D'Artagnan," announced a servant.

"Take it, and bear it with a light heart. May it be your amulet to its delivery, and then——"

"Oh, the addressee will be my good angel thereafter," returned D'Artagnan, with his usual high spirits returned.

Instead of a probation in the guards, D'Artagnan might

by a deed of distinction win transfer into the musketeers. Why might it not be that chance now presenting?

As the selected men began their preparations, their commander returned from his visit to his relative.

These two captains were dogs guarding a bone which the commander of the prime minister's guards tried to steal away entirely for himself.

It required a hand rough and tight to handle the image of soapstone which Richelieu sought to mold, this Gaston, and he gave it up, preferring to manipulate Louis, and to preserve him beyond the life of his union, if possible. The king, after he had been rejected by Anne in trying to obtain her alliance, was his sole support.

As Treville would defend his master like the mastiff, he approved of Treville's station, and agreed to make it permanent. Above all, he felt that while Treville would have arrested him at the altar of the cathedral, he would not injure him by an underhand move.

The captain judged the aspiring prelate fairly. But he could not believe that France would content so grasping an intellect; he believed he aimed at the papacy.

And he saw nothing but good in a French occupant of St. Peter's chair.

So he aided Richelieu and was the first to accede to part of his regiment becoming the cardinal's guards, under command of his lieutenant, Cavoye.

The advice from his relative set Treville thinking.

He had fought the Spanish, and he did not like them; he had no love for the queen from that country. He dis-

trusted her kindness to the minister, and charitably surmised that she was in the plot, denounced through the papers found by Father Joseph at Grammont House, and was trying to create a defense in case she was accused in connection with it.

But a gift of this nature must be taken and then scrutinized.

Because, contrary to his nature, Treville's bluntness delighted Louis, Treville had strengthened it, but refined it for his purposes.

He went straight to the monarch.

CHAPTER XIII.

IT IS HARD TO MOLD JELLY WITH A HOT SPOON.

Always brooding, the absence of his prime minister changed his brown study into a black one. The casual indispositions of statesmen throw the burden of affairs on the sovereign, and he sees, commonly, that it is too great for one man.

The king was sketching a new idea in a firearm, and he frowned at being interrupted—inventors, even when royal, or because they are royal, detest interruptions.

“Another arrest to make?” said he.

Formerly he would have said: “Another plot?”

Now that Richelieu had the whip hand, no one debated about plots, but some one was sent into exile or a prison; then the debates followed, if any were allowed.

“This time it is the partridge again,” returned the musketeer captain, with coolness. “It is a concert of all your majesty’s enemies.”

“Must we send a special messenger for the cardinal-duke?” asked Louis, sighing.

Treville had posted himself like a sentry before a side door under the tapestry so that his lord should not escape,” of which he was capable.

“Is this plot the reason the cardinal-duke has shut himself up in his fort at Fleury?”

“Oh, no; since it is not at him any more than at any

of your majesty's living shields that the machination is leveled."

"Ah!" with the weariness of one who had worn the crown long enough to be not altogether unwilling to throw it away. Although he would resent its being plucked off.

Treville revealed not only what the brother-in-law had told him, but what he had been informed upon by Riche-lieu. But the soldier exposed it unadorned and called murder in its six letters so that the king, who was squeam-ish, could not mistake.

History records monarchs who laid down the scepter and retired from business, but few or none are the instances of pretenders and usurpers who gave up without a deadly struggle.

Whether Louis, the Dismal, was son of Henry IV., the Garrulous and Jovial, or of the wily, secretive Vittorio Orsini, cavalier-servant to Queen Marie, he was, as wielder of the scepter, armed at all points, like a porcupine, against anyone asserting a claim on that wand.

He felt, as a personal wrong, those very traits which pointed out Harry's base sons as his veritable offspring. The fat Vendomes were jolly, ruddy, unctuous, true to their partisans, and gay.

They might have been also opposed to Gaston, whose paternity is also tainted with the Italian characteristics, but he had, at any early age, noticed what were the winning points, and he imitated them, or cultivated them, so that

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the Vendomes liked him, and, what is more wonderful, believed in him.

It was plain to Treville, then, that the Duke of Anjou, after forming an alliance with his two half-brothers and with Heaven knows what powers without the kingdom, had arranged a hunting party at Montbazou's hunting lodge, so convenient to make a swoop upon Fleury Manor. What would they do, then? If not kill the cardinal in a scuffle, for his men would contend stoutly, he would be passed over the frontier in a closed vehicle. This would isolate the king and spread confusion.

Louvigny's notes of Chalais' engagements left nothing to conjecture. That removal of the chief minister was preparatory to displacing King Louis by his brother. Richelieu's place was promised to the grand prior, with control of the church offices and the treasury, while his brother conducted the army.

Treville, far-seeing or gallant, kept the queen's part and name out of the project.

"I suppose Cæsar and Alexander think their names carry a predestined glory," sneered Louis, with his thin lips curved in a bitter smile.

The musketeer saw that, as usual, he was completely believed and kept silent. Accustomed to that mask, he drew conclusions from the scarcely perceptible play of the well-controlled features.

"If there is foundation for this, there are three heads to the offending," proceeded Louis, grasping the window

ledge so tightly that his sallow hands became almost white with loss of blood.

But his eyes remained like glass, reflecting what had luster without. Nothing pierced.

“The number of the heads little matters if they are guilty,” observed the soldier in a judge’s tone.

“But my brother, my own brother!” broke forth Louis, giving way to his feelings, which were enigmatical.

Treville was pondering. He could not imagine Richelieu, or any minister, sufficiently exacting and popularly powerful as to command three royal or quasi-royal heads to be lopped off on a scaffold, public or private.

“It is trying to do too much with one ax,” acknowledge he, matter-of-fact like. “Better a dungeon’s miasma.”

This allusion to Marshal Ornano’s dungeon at Vincennes, “worth its weight in arsenic,” did not disturb the monarch a jot; it was almost a confession of his guilty complicity to hear that unheeding.

Inwardly, the musketeer reminded him of this in disgust at the bolder execution not being preferred; but, for the moment, though he could wish his enemies, being the king’s, out of the way, he consented to a muzzle instead of the ax. In the first place, he must save the cardinal, and, since the king might be in a malleable mood, he sought to strike the bargain.

“It must be something between neck or nothing!” thought he. “Here goes, whether the cardinal makes me return or not. Without my pushing them into the heads-

man's hands, those hatchers of bad eggs will come to a bad end."

"Sire!" said he, quietly, "your head minister keeps all his senses in the employment of your majesty so that he neglects precautions for himself. It was not of his involution that Cavoye was given him with a squad to protect him from those enemies of yours, who are his. When Marshal Ornano was imprisoned, your friend, Count Chalais, begged mercy for him. Though, as Ornano was not his tutor as he was Prince Gaston's, I never could understand why he begged for him."

Louis frowned at the name.

"It was to him, Chalais, that the minister promised that the marshal should not suffer on the scaffold; he did not. Now, I guarantee that his eminence, naturally humane, and this doubled by his holy office, never seeks the death of the sinner. No, not even imprisonment, if they forego this eternal cultivating of ill weeds. It is deadly things that flourish in their plots. But, as he is the bulwark to your majesty and they are seeking to undermine him—remove him, what do I say? Your majesty should so save him that they will never attempt such mischief in the future."

"Ah, Treville, if this were the last, last time," sighed Louis, from the depths. It was the tone of a despairing traveler told of firm land while ever floundering in the quagmire.

"Sire, I answer that this rebuff for the indignity to one who wears your highness' cognizance in his heart, if his

robe is the church's, should be complete, not to be imitated. How ignoble it will be if the cardinal's tenants, grooms and stablemen beat off the prince's trampers, with hedge stakes and pitchforks. Let such attacks on your majesty's servitors be not openly and by armed men in your coats, sire!"

"So, so!" mumbled the king, seeing that he was to be led to identify himself with the cardinal's defenders and consequently range as his brother's indisputable foe.

"What are the cardinal's guards, since they are drawn from our well, let me not disparage them; but they and his few gentlemen pensioners and a visitor or two, who may be in the house paying his respects—why, these hack-swords of the riotous prince, saving your presence, will eat them up by the handfuls."

Cavoye will tickle the throat going down," said the sovereign, who, being fond of fencing, had had the ex-lieutenant of his bodyguard at the end of his sword more than once. "He would not have many around him in his study," agreed Louis.

"Just the clerks to work with him. And, by the way," suddenly said Treville, though he had the plea early on his mind, "what about the state papers, the seal, state and private, the reports which go to him, if the ill-meaning swooped upon them?"

"Captain, you were never more right. We must protect the state papers as well as the statesmen. Reinforce Cavoye," said the cautious prince.

"Oh, my lord!" reproached the chief of the bodyguards.

“I send my men to act under orders of Capt. Cavoye, the cardinal’s guardsman? Never would my men perform such orders with a gleeful heart. And, then, the cardinal would not accept that honor as a full one.”

“He has so much humility,” returned he, sarcastically.

“Nay, in all he does it is for your grace’s glory.”

So far, Louis had refrained from sending armed men against his erring brother, contenting with having interviews with him when the younger yielded as a mouse is supine under the cat’s claw; on the face all was fraternal. This time it would not be like a street wrangle, where even a prince might be knocked over the head, and no one would be to blame; a conflict at Fleury would be like a skirmish preliminary to a pitched battle.

“Let him have what you think meet,” he assented, slowly.

“Cavoye, or the cardinal-duke?”

There was no shifting with this straightforward soldier.

“Let them act as their lieutenants see fit, but always under the cardinal’s orders. The pontiff can be depended on not to precipitate the falling of blows.”

He could not help smiling, and the captain saw that.

He laughed outright and compelled his master to join him. Both knew that this invalid, this sickly student, had expressed his intention to take to the field in the next war.

Louis held out his hand languidly to him; he had enough of it. Treville saluted as if he were courtier no longer, but simply warrior.

Twenty minutes after, the trumpets sounded arouse. Then the musketeers' quarters also rang with a hundred voices. The last courier had brought news that the Spanish were massing in Franche-Comte. None could doubt among these men, bred and born for wars, that war was lowering.

A southern camp of observation would be established, and, as the cardinal was ill, the king might distract himself from his loneliness by going to review his troops.

So there was little comment on the march out of some sixty of the musketeers, as if to precede and set up quarters for the king, soon to follow with his traveling equipage. The court strategists had the route cut and dried, and the crowd at the gates repeated the list of tours to be passed through.

The palace guard suffered no diminution by this detachment. For, as the lifeguard was composed of gently-born persons only, and there were many chivalric gentlemen in town, some of whom were buried in debt and tainted with fashionable vices, including dabbling in keeping gaming houses, making counterfeit money for circulation on the border, and amusing dinner tables, they hastened to enroll in the musketeers or to claim active occupation, since generally, their names had been long ago inscribed.

Evidently, as the ladies reported to the queen to annoy her, a war with her brother in Spain would be popular.

Capt. Treville summoned into his private office three of

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the troopers, who, at least by name, are not strangers to us.

Three were anything but strangers to D'Artagnan. They were his only Parisian friends, counselors and comrades.

"I see, Aramis," said one of these, circumspect, serious, superb in bearing, using a melodious though somewhat sad voice of marked purity and distinction at a time when the language was bristling with obsolete words and familiar phrases, "this is not merely a tour to dazzle the milkmaids and boors before the village wine shops."

Aramis, slight, gentle, with a very keen eye set in refined features of a thoughtful cast, looked up from taking a map off the wall to spread it on a table.

"Yes, Athos, this is something more than a ride around with the king to a country seat, after dogs bark. I had begun to think we were to handle everything with gloves on. Ah! still we are far from the times when a Visconti or a Medicis were stabbed in a cathedral choir, or, to bring my instances nearer home, a marshal of France could be hacked to pieces out there."

A burly musketeer had slightly resented the map clearing the table of sundry flagons and a tray with cold food, fried river fish and bread; he stopped scoffing at the chart and boisterously said:

"Yes, they choke prisoners now in the dungeon gases. The sword cutlers have gone out of business who forged knives for the last two Henrys."

"Hush, Porthos! and let us know why you wanted

Aramis to unfold a map before you. Do you think it is the 'Addresses of the Hundred Impenitent Scarlet Women of Paris?' "

"Scarlet women, forsooth. Are we not likely to have more trouble with the Scarlet Man, who, if he is lost for the time, will come out of his study with a new plan of war, by which we shall have our corps decimated? This comes from having a churchman to govern an army."

"Hum, Porthos!" returned Aramis, who, from having been educated for holy orders, was piqued by this slur, "for a churchman, he pretty well drove the Spanish out of the Valteline and defied the pope to make serfs of the original proprietors."

"But what do you see on your map?" asked Athos, to turn the discussion.

The second of D'Artagnan, in his encounter with Chalais and company, had leaned both elbows on the map to hold it firm; several comrades looked over his broad shoulders, and his small eyes twinkled with confidence and conceit, as he replied:

"I told you all along that there must be war with Spain. We are going to have done with this perverse creature who swills olive oil without getting fat, and devours oranges without getting mellow and sweet. For my part, after assembling our forces in Languedoc and Gascony"—he eclipsed half the map by applying his round forefingers to the spots cited—"I should throw men over the mountains——"

"Bravo! Porthos could do it, but even grant he could

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throw a man and his steed, it would take time at a man at a throw.”

“I should do it, and march into the Escorial Palace.”

“Hail, Strategist Porthos! Spain is carried and harried! Eh, Athos, if he writes out his plan, will you not lay it before the king?”

“Gentlemen, it is infallible, if Porthos’ thumb were a viaduct.”

“It is a strong hand,” said Aramis, cajolingly, smiling as he patted with his fine, soft hand the enormous neck of the musketeer, much as a dwarf caresses an envied giant, over whom intimacy and close study of the few but marked traits gives a mastery.

Amid the laughter, an usher opened a door and called out:

“The captain seeks Athos, Aramis and Porthos!”

CHAPTER XIV.

THE COMMAND TO ATHOS.

The three walked towards the captain's cabinet.

They were introduced into the anteroom, but thence admitted severally.

Treville was almost gloomy. He who had spent months confirming the animosity of Louis against the ever-magnifying Richelieu, was in the situation being compelled to serve this foe or incline entirely towards the faction dooming his king to deposition, if not death.

If, in his rage at this direct attack, the cardinal, victorious, stamped out the very brands, Treville would lose his occupation; out of the extinguished embers would no longer burst the flames of rebellion and insubordinacy which made his sword up to now as valuable as the state-helmsman's pen.

"Count of La Fère," said he, to this soldier, giving him his true title in token that this parley was on a solid topic, "you are not the one, versed in doings and sayings, not to divine that his majesty's lifeguards do not go out armed for war merely to parade the highway."

The count bowed as if he were in the throne room and not a military satrap's cabinet.

"In short, there is a plot, with a head, this time; one to entrap the prime minister at his country residence."

"The trap need be strong and watched closely. The

cardinal, for all he is sick, is the one to carry away trap and all to where he could have it struck off his foot. I have seen wolves thus foil the trappers in our hills."

"Yes, but he is in danger. There may be hunters ready to support the trap."

"Well, the timoneer is always in danger, in quiet seas as in stormy ones. There are sunken rocks."

"Under guise of a hunting party, the enemies of his eminence will have power to surround his seat."

"If they go in force. I hear that we are fifty?"

"Sixty—threescore! There will be a troop of the queen's guards in touch——"

"We require assistance?" cried Athos, with the musketeers' vanity.

"Oh, the country around may be malevolent towards his eminence, who bought pieces to add to his property, through agents, and so the vendors, who know their customers too late, hate them for making a good bargain. They will aid his enemies."

"Boors!"

"All that, but they learned a good deal in the late wars. But the guards do not go down with the orders to assist you; they are simply escorting a queen's messenger, who has a letter for a lady in the neighborhood."

"It should be an autograph to be guarded as carefully as a premier's health."

"Well, I have seen the first letter the queen wrote to our ruler; on the occasion of their troth. She pledged herself to do all that was agreeable to her mother—a dutiful

daughter then, she is no doubt a dutiful spouse now—so that I expect she wishes to please her husband. To cheer him she must be cheerful herself, so she writes for a song bird, of the superior of a religious house by Fleury.”

“A song bird?”

“Oh, in human shape. This song bird having lost her mate, pitches a sorrowful key—to bring her out at the court, where she is foreset to charm, is necessary for her health.”

“Oh, the queen is again going to try to have the company of Lady Sansforain in the palace?”

Treville was not surprised at his soldier being so well instructed.

“That being so, you will understand that we are executing a diversion. It is an axiom that no man can be in two places at once. Well, if the Duke of Anjou is down there harassing the cardinal, it is positive that he cannot again waylay the donna on her road to Paris the second time.”

“To do so would be to insult the queen twice, and I would rather not have done it once. Sir, the Spanish, more so than the Italians, like their revenge as a side dish, cold! I think this doubly ingenious,” Athos continued. “This hunting party—it will not scruple to go in the broad sunlight to assail Fleury?”

“I doubt that, by your leave. The Duke Gaston proceeds like the banditti, whose manners he apes. He failed, it is true, in the early hours of the night. Now, he will, I think, hound on his men at the late ones. He knows the statesman’s habits. He works in the night, rests a little,

and rises betimes. To catch him in his rest in the small hours will surprise him."

"I am not so sure that Richelieu can be taken by surprise."

"He will be this time, by numbers, if we had not the warning."

"Oh, it is worthy of your excellence, captain, to warn one not too much your warm friend, I fear."

"I? Higher than that!"

"Then it is proper of the king, since the premier is invaluable to him, who likes not clerkly work."

"Not he; but on the same line."

"Never the queen. The queen saves the cardinal?" ejaculated Athos, with unwonted frankness.

"Because he is a churchman and she a devout, and she wishes to do good to her enemies," said the captain, trying to look meek.

"I see!" cried the Count of La Fère, after cogitation.

"You always see farther in the millstone than I, my dear count."

"I see that the queen has been hurt by the loose and yet emphatic way in which she is, by the forecasters, foisted into a second marriage with the next prince of the house royal."

"That offends woman, does it?"

"It hurts a queen in her pride. I am certain that her imagination saw that if an attack was made on the cardinal's house, it would be in the wolf's hours. So, as the redoubtable Gaston is safe to stand in the rear of the as-

saulting column, a stray shot, or even a silver inkstand hurled at the men coming up the ladder and striking the hooter-on at the foot, will, in some likelihood, make a candidate for the royal vaults in St. Denis Abbey, of my Lord of Anjou."

"In good faith, my dear Athos," said Treville, firmly, "if you think the queen looks ahead like that, I rank myself on her side from this hour. She hates the cardinal-duke as much as he does her—no? at least, she hates Gaston more."

"My dear captain, if there is a Spaniard in the train of this highway prince, I should not lift an eyebrow if he were to fall with a hole in his head or his breast. Some one will have shot him with the very weapon he provided: love for his own queen."

"If he be not better paid for it than usually queens recompense their loving servants, then Prince Gaston will be slain cheap."

"It appears to me," went on the count with his calm, "that the report made to you for the king will have the red line, if it mentions that in repelling the midnight storming party, there fell, by an unknown hand, one of the princes——"

"One of them!"

"Why, the cardinal-duke is equally inimical to Gaston, Cæsar and Alexander."

"Hello! do you think all the stormy birds flock together?"

“They are courageous enough to lead where Gaston will shout ‘On, on!’ in the rear. That is how he backs his friends.”

Treville brooded.

“It would look a terrible judgment, in some eyes, if such a holocaust of royal princes occurred when a prince of the church was reached at in his own bedroom.”

“Terrible!” said the wise, noble musketeer, “but most will would attribute the judgment to the king and council. I suppose, then, than you would give me the private advice, since, I assume, I am chosen for the momentous expedition, to prevent——”

“In the first place, to prevent the king’s representative being injured, as you would the king’s person. Afterwards, as the sons of royal sires should not die like common men, prevent them being carried away as dead out of the nocturnal scuffle. Now, Athos, I am aware that you gentlemen of the king’s military household do not like Richelieu for being so soon duke and peer, and that his robe offends you. Well, I have sympathy with the man, for he is son of a soldier, like myself, and many another. Above all, and what I am certain of, he loves France. He will be loyal to his native land, spite of all. You raise your brows at that? Well, he is a Frenchman first, a prelate next. He had no money—he now fills his purse out of the public coffers. As long as he expends it in France, I care not. As long, too, as he is faithful to our master, hang his little squabbles and foibles, let him

scribble tragedies while he lets us act sublime conceptions on that stage called the battlefield of Europe.

“If that Chalais were minister, he would set Henry IV. as model to his son as the gallant lover of every Madge, Kate and Annabella in Christendom; instead, as the cardinal does, hold up the knightly king as a warrior. If Richelieu is to perish, let it be, if my will has anything to do with it, in his state bed, by the stroke of Providence. No more knives poisoned as under the Florentines, no more butchery as of Concini on the bridge.”

“I am with you, captain,” said the other, without enthusiasm. “Only a rare man could so boldly challenge the antagonism of the exalted——”

“Bah! exalted by freak of birth! Woe to us all, soldier and statesman, if a Gaston follow this Louis! As for the Lords Cæsar and Alexander, let me return to my home with my sword sheathed rather than follow them in their hare-brained ventures. Cæsar is partial to Thais, and would let the Louvre be burned down if she wanted lights on her way through the gardens, and Alexander wishes to be cardinal, and what glistens on the Roman hills beyond, rather than command the army.”

“Then we secure the principals, not wound them, as lesson to players with those keen-edged tools, conspirers against the head.”

“Oh, you would be lucky if you could put out all these brands on the one hearth, the cardinal’s, with one pail of water.”

“Water leaves no stain like blood. Well, in two words

we save the minister and we spare the princes, if they join in the assault?"

"It is so delicate a task that I rely on so noble a man as you. Ah, Athos, in going out, you might repeat my desire to chat with the Knight of Herblay."

CHAPTER XV.

THE MISSION TO ARAMIS.

Under his real name, there being no masks worn here, the musketeer saluted his commander.

“Sir,” began the latter, as Aramis stood at ease most exquisite, “I do not believe for a moment that *you* believe for a moment that the king’s soldiers of élite are recruiting sergeants——”

“Decidedly! You do not mistake me for a military proselyter. We are like the boy who takes the pastry under the hedge, obtained with difficulty and eats it to his own teeth. Ostensibly, we parade before the clods, but—what are the secret orders, sir?”

“You come of a Breton family identified with the church. You studied for that profession, but you have a bias for mortal arms!”

“Captain, some sow their wild oats out of an alms bag, some out of a student’s satchel; I, out of a steel cap! When I expect the crop, after the next war, I expect, too, to have satisfied my latent allegiance to Bellona, sly snake in the grass! and I shall seek my grain in the study or the chapel.”

“In that case, you have time!”

“Are we not at last to brush against the Spanish?” cried Aramis, with too loud surprise and disappointment in a contained young man like him to be natural.

“My dear Cuirass quilted with a presbyter’s gown,” responded the warrior, humorously, showing that he was no dupe, “the ruler of Spain will never order his gunners to lay a gun towards the Louvre as long as his sister is mistress of it. He will bluster, but not yet will there be war. But have no biting of lip over that! Your street encounters keep your weapons from rusting, and they are winked at. But the Parisians hear from their country cousins that they never get a sight of you, famous corps, and we think you should show the rustics that you are real flesh and not pictures on the palace gate wall.”

“Oh, we are going to be marched out to show! We shall appear at the village fairs, like the mock Roman guards in the miracle plays?”

“They who have eyes to see may see you march out as far as Fleury, it is true, but there, with your detachment, Sir Aramis, you come to halt without more noise than on an expedition vital. You shun the village green, and you camp by Fleury Manor.”

“Fleury, where his eminence reposes for his shattered health?”

“Now that my lord duke as the royal counselor never gets repose and must not be ill, my lord, in the king’s service, is hale as you, or I! Instead of reposing, by the same mark, he dispatches a pile of business where he is not interrupted by office seekers and other gnats—he can make a hole in the mass down there.”

“Am I, a king’s musketeer, bound to preserve the minister’s peace, to intrude on this busy man and prevail on

a cardinal to quit his silly couch—I mean his hard leather seat—and drive to town?”

“Hear him!” laughed the Gascon captain. “I see that in your breviary or sword-sling pocket, you carry ‘Some Suggestions on Changing the Government!’ You are too heady, my dear Aramis! The King’s Guards do not drag ministers about, as was the wont in barbaric days, at their horses’ tails. No, we shield those whom the king esteems. In point of fact, are not the musketeers guarding him now, under my nominee, Cavoye?”

“Sooth! they have been so cardinalized, these old comrades of ours, that we should not recognize them if they returned to the mess room!”

“The question is not do we recognize them, but do they still recognize the king as their master! I would they were all down at Fleury with the menaced man!”

“Oh, the gale menaces! the gathering gale!”

“If the gale gathers, it does so to distribute!”

“Ah, it comes to a blow! as we say on our coast!” and Aramis lost his equanimity and rubbed his hands vulgarly.

Treville seized his sleeve and drew him to the center of the room. Even in his own sanctum, if there were no trap in the ceiling or below their feet, they need not fear listeners.

“Come to one blow, two, three,” continued the captain, “that weighs nothing. Do you know what a surprise party is?”

Aramis started at this irrelevance, but the military commander was brusque and disconnected.

“I do; but the kind, in war or peace? In the former, the enemy is beguiled into believing that an attack is distant, whereupon he is overrun by a select body which——”

“Accurate! but in peace——”

“Well, we are primitive in Brittany, where I hail from.”

Treville sat on a chair arm and assumed an enrapt mien like a great baby fond of folk-lore.

“Go on! after you describe your Breton mode, I will, by your leave, comment on it.”

Though not wanting encouragement, the young musketeer proceeded in his smooth voice:

“Among our heaths and hills, when a person becomes very much liked by his neighbors, they plan to become a special providence to him. By cunning inquiries, they learn just what his heart’s wishes are, and collect their realization in substantial form. They call on him at an unwonted hour, without any warning—which would take the flavor out of the windfall. They overwhelm him with their loads. In common gratitude, he can but beg them to make themselves at home. The fire is blown up and wood thrown on, torches are stuck in the clay wall, and the board is covered with the eatables fresh come. The cider is brought, in all the vessels. There is a feast memorable in the local records. That is our idea of a surprise party!”

“A very good one! It makes my mouth water! That

is a kind to be greeted—in Brittany. But our ingenious Prince Gaston is ever on the alert to kill time so depressing on an objectless younger brother. He piously dismissed from his boyish mind the idea of suffering the headache due to a crown's pressure. He has improved upon that crude conception. Precisely as he rids the queen's ward of her decidedly inconvenient clog, a husband, he imagines something novel in the way of a surprise party to his eminence."

"Oh, is Anjou the neighbor of Richelieu?"

"*Pro tempore!* and when it comes to doing him a good turn! His royal highness is staying at Montbazon's hunting lodge, and so becomes the minister's neighbor! Well, finding that his neighbor, under pretense of illness, is making himself veritably ill by toiling at the accumulation of state business, Prince Gaston's well-known kindness prompts him to give him a surprise party amended Anjou fashion."

The more Treville, who rarely jested, used a merry tone, the more glum became his hearer.

"The prince knows his duty, and it is the more handsome for him to be neighborly as it is not current that he and the cardinal are friends."

"Calumny! That weed which springs up in princes' steps, unhappily!"

"So the royal neighbor intends to give a surprise party to his hierarchical one?"

"Not a doubt of that, or the king would not have

called his musketeers from the—the dice box and wine bottle!”

“Thank you, captain, for the compliment to my comrades!”

“Oh, you will see plenty of wine when you exchange quarters! So this prince, who thinks your Breton parties are lacking politeness, is going to make his surprise so complete that he and his unannounced guests will leap in on the unnotified host by the windows and, eke, the chimney!”

“I undervalue his eminence’s prudence if he has not had two or three stout iron bars set across the fireplace in the room where surprise parties use the flue for entrance!” said Aramis.

“You understand the prelacy better than I,” assented Treville, with simplicity. “If I were a cardinal, I should rely not on iron bars but on the sanctity of my office!”

“Yes, he does, as a cardinal; but, as a statesman,” said the budding casuist, “who has a new neighbor, with a reputation for surprise parties, he——”

He made the gesture of leveling a pistol.

“You are right—he would! My dear Aramis, on second thoughts, gentlemen dressed to astonish the louts in their new hunting suits and boots would not come in at chimneys. There is no need, come to think of it! Never is admission refused to gentlemen who knock at the door in broad daylight and show that their baskets contain not petards and grenades but pasties, fruit, wine and the like!”

“Scarcely! Our discipline is strict, thanks to our com-

mander being a martinet ; but," went on Aramis, with sincerity, "if this kind of provender came to our barracks, and yet the bearers did not have word or countersign, I confess, they would be let through!"

"Hence, one of these fine mornings, as it might be within three days of this, when the cardinal-duke's porter opens the gates and sees a long train of butlers, cooks, fruit carriers, flower gatherers, a procession which might be bound to Catullus' table——"

"A gentleman may quote Latin after his own idea, but, captain, there is a certain prejudice among us to say Lucullus when we mean the giver of a feast; for Catullus was a poet and, I doubt, from a little experience as a poet myself, that ever a poet gives a feast—unless his powerful friends gave him a surprise party!"

Ignoring the correction, the other pursued:

"The porter, seeing this appetizing pageant, will let them all in, to the pastry cook's boy. Particularly, they will say, by their spokesman, that the Anjou house steward—that unctious Master Gouchard, from whom one would take a decoction of senna as if it were nectar—that their master the duke, on his passing after the hunt, would probably find Fleury more convenient than the Montbazon lodge for shelter and a snack."

"This surprise seems blunted by this precursor!"

"Yes, to spare the pontiff the inconvenience of having to entertain the prince and so numerous a cortège, Anjou took the liberty of sending his domestics ahead to prepare the banquet!"

"I shall always maintain that the pure and simple Breton surprise party is unexceptionable of its kind, but the Gaston-Anjou betterment is praiseworthy, too!"

"So, you see——"

"I see that I am to keep my detail on the move without bite or sup unless we 'find' ourselves on the road of that regiment of roast cooks, pastry cooks, and bottlers under Gen. Gouchard. Then we may break our fast with the comestibles prepared for the Prince of Anjou and his sporting guests, under the cardinal-minister's restricted roof."

"Dear Herbaly, you will never be officer of the king's bodyguard!"

Seeing the hearer smile, a little contemptuously, he was sure his bolt had flown aside the mark.

"You will never be prior or abbot, I mean!"

This time Aramis laughed; lowly, but it was still a laugh and had contempt in it, too.

"Help us!" cried the captain, "is our barracks a hot-bed of the loftiest ambition? Not that I deplore that, for the best soldiers for activity are the aspiring. No," he resumed, solemnly, "no eating and drinking! On the contrary, your mission is to spoil the feast—in one sense."

"That will be out of character with the musketeers—they fight well who eat well! If that is not in 'Cæsar's Commentaries,' it ought to be!"

"No, you are not to waylay the purveyors of the banquet. But precede them in their march on Fleury. Instal your men in the outbuildings and announce yourself

to the cardinal's steward as sent to his eminence by me, from his majesty. Tell him that the three princes design to make him their hostage, and let him act as his wit directs! I do not wash my hands of it, for I believe that as prince of the church he will forestall any bloodshed—at Fleury and on that day, at least!”

“I am to inform his eminence of the scheme and place my troops at his orders? But my men in the outhouses will chafe, if they snuff the smell of the beef and fowl and wine up their nostrils!”

“Bah! if the cardinal is above the fleshpots, he is as a host sure to regale your soldiers out of his own cellars! Besides, when you shall have cut in before the prince's steward, all the savor of the surprise party will have fled. The wine will lose its sparkle—Anjou wine once opened, palls! I do not believe one of the hunting party, on seeing the musketeers appear at all doorways surrounding the manor, and themselves, incidentally, will quarrel over a capon or a flask!”

“If they quarrel, my men fasting and the hunters sharp-set capons will be limbed and bottles cracked!”

“Your mission, Aramis, is achieved when you warn the wise and prudent minister!”

“Captain, I am delighted to be of service to the king, his chief military officer and his eminence, potentate of the church in whose bosom I trust to rest!”

He was going to cross himself but remembering where he was he tapped his sword hilt significantly and departed.

“Oh, let me see our king of the midgets——”

“Eh?”

“Porthos!”

“I would rather have Porthos for my boon companion when I retire, than Aramis for my chaplain! I could not make him that since he has no money and the chaplaincy of the guards is worth some thousands. I should like to see him and the cardinal commune! oh, those two of the missal and chasuble will understand in a twinkling!”

CHAPTER XVI.

IN WHICH ARE DETAILED THE IMPORTANT INSTRUCTIONS DELEGATED ON PORTHOS.

There was not one word about politics in the commander's address to his worthy Porthos. On the opposite, he was tersely informed that shortly after he and his squad should arrive at Fleury, a number of porters would also reach that point, with provisions. It is true that the porters, and even their superior, might allege that they were bringing them for a hunters' feast, but, in war, the first comers had the pick, and it was inculcated upon the Knight of the Vallon that for a circuit of a mile around Fleury Manor, it was "state of war" as far as Porthos' troops was concerned.

"We are to live on the country," interpreted the musketeer, showing, in an amiable grin, teeth in a mouth fit for an ogre.

"To the last dish! My dear Vallon, with you half a word goes as a whole volume to these oscillating soldiers who spend half their time between the brewery and the Ready Rhymer. I see that you see that cutting off an enemy's supply is as important a stroke as seizing his castle. Devour! If I spy a crumb on your mustache when you return, I'll cashier you and send all your misled companions into a disciplinary regiment on the German frontier! by the word of a Troisvilles!"

When excited, Treville broadened his name.

“Captain,” said Porthos, patting his belt buckle unconsciously, like those Epigastricans who believe the seat of intelligence is in the mid-regions, “the more perfectly to obey your instructions, I shall keep my men without a nip or drop up to Fleury.”

“Come, come,” felicitated the military arm of the realm, when alone, “Athos will preserve the instigators from mischance; Aramis will subtly warn his eminence, and Porthos will eat up the feast, so that the Gastonets will be left with a flat taste alone in their dry mouths!”

Almost as soon as born, the rumor that there was to be hostilities with our neighbor of Spain was authoritatively hushed up; if a tolerably large force of the musketeers left the Louvre, it was merely a number of invalided going off on “furlough” to imbibe their native waters and air.

To the unimpressionable, the three squads, under the musketeers designated, were very hale looking for men on “sick leave.”

But as, simultaneously with the troopers quitting town, a number of nobles identified with the Anjou and Vendome factions, also left by one gate or another, the movements distracted the curious.

Leaving town variously, as well as Capt. Guitauts' contingent escorting the queen's own messenger, D'Artagnan, gladly bearing the invitation to the widow of Lord Sanforain, they did not come within calling distance after losing sight of the steeples.

On entering Normandy, they met, at the Inn of the

Three Pines, where the four commanders conferred on the next steps. Their men, overflowing the street of the village, debated on their errand, real and fictitious.

Some averred that they were going to arrest the prime minister, fallen into disgrace, and whose withdrawal was to prevent a scandal in the capital. If forewarned, this talk of a hunting meet might cover a rallying of his friends to protect his retreat, in which case there would be a collision with them, since the musketeers were bound to ride at and over anybody.

But all the time, like good horsemen, they saw to their equipment. There might be chase.

From experience, those under Athos knew that he never mingled in sham and frivolous actions; those under Aramis knew that he was sagely brave and took good care of his skin. As for Porthos, since like captain, so his men, they had ample faith that if there were blows they would not be received on an empty stomach, unless exceptionably.

The Queen's Guards rode on without any remarks. It was a change from palace guard mounting and they were a little tired of the mob reviling them for being watch upon "the Spanish lady." As for the messenger, he felt that letter burning on his heart as though the ink were vitriol.

"Never was the sun more bright and never the grass more green!" he said, trying to cajole himself that he did not care an ounce of thistledown for going to see the relict of Baron Sansforain again.

The next conjunction should be by Fleury.

The last stage was made with such measures as became venturing in a hostile land. The two parties separated before passing Monthereux, where Guitaut went through. If he expected a placid entry he was mistaken. The little burg was thronged; the squires and their dames and daughters had come in their best to see the almost royal hunting party and greet the prince royal. They hailed the troop under an idea that the queen was sending a deputation to greet Anjou, but Guitaut, already a reserved man, shook his head and pushed his horse through the press, without letting a bunch of flowers be thrust upon him or a ribbon be tied to his horse's saddle horn.

He only waited to secure a guide ere hastening on to the Visitation Sisters' convent.

The musketeers had made the circuit of the hamlet. Porthos rode right on to Fleury Manor, where he placed his men in the outhouses and drew a cordon towards Montheureux so that the rustics could not annoy the cardinal. There Porthos and his men, champing their mustaches, for he had not given them a bait, awaited the coming of the "officers of the mouth."

Athos guarded the approaches and held some men in reserve to be sent to any menaced point.

Aramis led his men into the courtyard, after getting passage by an occult and ecclesiastical password, and, dismounting quietly, rapped as tenderly at the main wicket as though he were the humblest of begging friars.

On hearing that this errand concerned his eminence personally, besides being on behalf of the king, the door-

ward dropped his pride and undid one door. But on seeing that the mild speaker was armed and in military uniform, with a horse caparisoned for battle at his rear, he would have shut him out.

The cavalier simply set his boot against the door and stood fixedly.

Looking past him, as he was not tall like himself, the porter was horrified to see horsemen invading the yard.

“Oh, we are all king’s men and his eminence’s servants,” explained Aramis, serenely, “and I am to speak with your lord. Meanwhile, though my troopers could bivouac in the yard, I recommend, to make our stay pleasant, that you should have the horses put in the stables while the men not guarding them should be stowed in the pantries.”

“We have accommodated the king’s retinue!” said the porter, proudly.

“Accompany my draft, and as the draft of yours in this passage is likely to give me a cold in the head, which will not mollify the voice of a royal messenger, pray acquaint the duke’s usher that I may deliver my advices. Order of the king!”

“But his eminence is asleep!” said the man.

“Nonsense! his eminence has not come here to sleep!”

“I should say that his secretaries are asleep!”

“I know them, and their habits; if Count Chavigny and Master Cheret sleep, then Desmarets is awake! He can no more find sleep here than in restless Paris. Announce me to him!”

“Captain of the musketeers?”

“Not at all! Announce me as the Abbé Herblay!”

The man shook with a maze at a soldier presenting himself as a clerk—yet he had seen many religious go-betweens in odd garbs.

“Yes, in this house an abbé would pass where a military officer might not!”

“You are right, sir! Ah, to think that we came here for tranquillity!” And calling a servant to transmit the orders for the company and setting his deputy to his post, he took the caller up to the cabinet and clerks’ offices.

Not only was the unsleeping Desmarets awake, but his master was with him, having only napped while at this place of repose.

His attention had been called to the noise in the yard, but he had not moved a brow or winked a lid.

The secretary knew Herblay the more as they had been in the same seminary, but he would have wished to see him in another dress.

But on the first word that he came to act out royal business of no bad omen, Richelieu, who overheard, dismissed his writer, with a copyist in the corner, sharing a biscuit with a kitten, and the two left the visitor with the minister.

The cardinal and the priest in apprenticeship knew their class with the nude language of the convent, where speech being forbidden, conversation is carried on dumbly.

If Aramis was in military apparel, the minister was in the loose and easy wrap of a literary man; he had a voluminous dressing gown which a little bore out the char-

acter of his being an invalid, for it was wadded, only the waistcord was a rosary with the cross and a bauble or two. He also wore a skullcap, but it was such as a librarian dons rather than to hide the tonsure. As he wore mustache and royal, like most prelates of the age, nothing much betrayed his profession.

Richelieu was not yet published as the man of genius and the inflexible minister afterwards manifest, but there are diviners who, seeing a ship's wake, can tell whither it is bound!

At a glance at the emissary, the duke had perceived that nothing like a decree lurked in this message. To arrest him, though only at the outset of his fortune, not a simple musketeer would have been chosen; their captain would have presented himself in person, it being the prerogative of the bodyguard commander to make important state arrests.

He sat down and motioned that the young man was to speak.

"My lord," said he, so reverent as to be almost devout, "a horrid design against your eminence has driven me here."

Resting his pointed chin on his lean hand, the minister listened to the whole revelation of the stupendous and demoniacal plot, Aramis filling up gaps in the too concise relation of Treville from his deep knowledge of the persons and times involved. Not a feature expressed other emotion than the concentrated attention he gave to supreme subjects, if another breast than his own had been

doomed to the dagger, he could not have evinced more calm.

“This is a great man!” thought the musketeer; “only the chiefs of state have this peculiar courage to brave such menaces.”

As one relishes a blood-curdling ghost story, if well told, Richlieu seemed to like this narration, unfolded by Aramis with all the spirit of that period, rich in romantic adventures, fabulous episodes and the complicated intrigues of which we try to write faithfully. Almost all other report bringers to his study, spoke briefly and aridly.

He appeared to thank the elegant discourser with his nod at the end.

“In sum,” said the soldier, “as it came to the king’s ear and as Capt. Treville vouches for it, you are to be done to death!”

“Again?” Then as the kitten had strayed off out of the wastepaper box and come to smell the grease on the musketeer’s boots, the cardinal simply stooped, offering his rounded back to the messenger’s sword had he been a traitor, and picked up the little beast which he fondled.

“It is called Friquet,” said he, apologetically, as if his visitor had come to debate on natural history, “because it eats those little sparrows so known. The Duke of Anjou, then, is to direct the hunt over to Fleury?” he summed up. “He will claim hospitality. I am to house him and in the night they are to murder their host?”

“Murder may be the word! but they may quail and it

would be a forced crossing of the border!" said the envoy, deprecating.

"So the king merely sends me extra guards and leaves me then with no other orders?"

"My captain said nothing more."

The minister knew that the king was a master of dissimulation, that "added virtue of kings," but he had pierced it; he was sure that out of relief, as a schoolboy hears his schoolmaster is dismissed, Louis would rejoice as much as Gaston, but not so openly.

Then why save him?

"Are you sure sir," he resumed, "that as a man of warfare, your captain did not add private instructions to those you openly delivered?"

The envoy reflected; the atmosphere of his study inclined one to think. Half the time, when one puts words into his principal's mouth, if they are timely and fruitful, they are never disowned; only the subordinate must know how his superior would have spoken.

The great enfevered eyes were fastened on him.

"My good lord," replied he, quickly, "the captain does not discourse at length or at random. We about him know his ways. His Spartan terseness is eloquent to his corporals. I have the honor, then, to offer my special troop, while two others are guarding the roads and the mansion and appurtenances. My captain," he went on, freely, as he saw the hearer believed Treville capable of such manliness to even a foe, "he proposes such a stroke as must have occurred to your eminence on learning that

an army is at his back, for the musketeers are each ten men!"

So saying, he set his hand on his hip with that touch of the braggart not ill-becoming the assertive audacity of his company.

"I must own nothing has occurred to me, sir? The kindness of his majesty and the obligation his captain puts me under—they overpower me!"

He stopped to stroke the cat and to hide his emotion.

Aramis believed in his emotion as in the cat's; the claws were there all the time under the velvet. Aramis dared not move a muscle; he would not have smiled to himself if tears had dropped on the table—he was an adept, who disbelieved in sincerity.

"So the captain thinks that in my place, but he retaining his violent modes of war——" suggested the premier.

"Oh, no, no! In your eminency's place he would be your eminence and would have recourse to one of those bold strokes distinguishing your diplomacy, as well as it does a soldier. The cunning do not foresee bold strokes and they will not be ready for it."

"Ah, but a bold stroke in that game of chess called diplomacy may win, but at what a sacrifice of men!"

"Bah! we are in our coats to be sacrificed if the state gains!" rejoined the musketeer, very soldier-like. "The plot is plain: the gentlemen of the hunt will converge towards this house from all points as wild beasts seek water course after the chase. When the prince——"

“What prince?”

“Oh, one of the princes!” replied the young man, with a wave of the hand, as much as to say: “You have your choice!” “When the prince in the rear, not the van, arrives he will give the signal; still in the rear, when all are around him, he will beg admission.”

“He, or they, will be in number?”

“Yes, here, at your gate; but at Montheureux, after all the hunting party are out and about, he would be alone.”

“Oh! on the eve of such an atrocity, he would be alone?”

“Why, he knows not whom to trust now, for some little mishaps in Paris to his cronies reduces their ranks. I beg to answer for it that if your eminence were to honor my little command, and go straight in their midst to Montheureux, in the dawn, we should be able to cope with any force he can raise at the nonce!”

“Beshrew me, but I thought your captain counseled another move!”

There was a pause, Aramis dying to know what he ought to have put forward as Treville’s plan.

“Frankness for frankness, I thought that it would be more warlike to abide the coming, and if anyone at the head—or the rear—received a shot in the rush, why, I would say high mass over his corpse though he were a prince of the blood!”

“I must confess,” said Aramis, with the smile of a man thrice his age, “this occurred to me as a musketeer;

but, as a wandering sheep who means to return into the fold, I dared not anticipate your eminence."

It was evident that Richelieu looked around for his secretary to write down the name of this prolific wit, who might be useful some day of another emergency.

"What am I to do with the captive, if I thus confront him?" he demanded, abruptly.

"Oh, that is plain," responded the young man, pleased at this condescension, fostering his vein. "You will just thank his highness for sending on his domestics, cooks and butlers, to prepare the enormous feast at your residence; but as such hilarity and gluttony ill suit the dwelling of a church dignitary and a statesman foremost, you have the honor not merely to give up your best room to his highness but the entire house! Let the merrymakers, then, make merry! In a word, you place Fleury at his disposition, and you take yourself to Paris, having quite recovered, and being eager to thank the king for his interest in his first minister—as to health and safety!"

"Neat!" said Richelieu, three times, with more admiration each time. "Ah, Friquet," said he to his kitten, as if he thought himself alone but for this confidant, which certainly would not repeat his words to his enemies, "we missed something when Capt. Cavoye came with his musketeers to guard us, and in the muster there was not the Knight of Herblay."

The owner of this title bowed to the ground.

"But I think Desmarets called you the Abbé Herblay?"

"I was reading for orders, as my family is of the bishop

of Rennes', when a little worldly matter not unconnected with using a sword, a deuced weapon for one in a long robe, compelled your servant to——”

“As I have had an accountant study up the losses by dueling, perhaps——” and Richelieu rose as if to take a book from a shelf.

“Nay, your eminence, I am too infinitesimal to be in your register. A half-pay officer undertook to cane me for coming in between him and a fair worshiper. In our scuffle, very indecorous for the holy water brush, he received a splash in the eye! He flourished his cane—very gross in a holy edifice—and I opposed his cane with the beadle's staff! Hence, a challenger, and my man——” Aramis covered his eyes with a fine, foppish, cambric handkerchief and sobbed as if his heart would break at this avowal.

Richelieu put the cat on the table, where it spied a sheet of clean paper and incontinently lay down upon it, and opening a book with clasps, wrote a line or two.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT THE OLD STONE CROSS.

“But whiles he thought to steal the single ten,
The king was slyly fingered from the deck!”

—*Henry VI.*

If Aramis had been a traitor, this might be his death warrant; luckily he meant this man as well as if he had chosen him for his patron.

As if the statesman suspected his line of thought, he abruptly asked:

“If this proposed escort is accepted, under whose orders do they march?”

“I thought I said, by your eminence’s to an inch!” was the steady reply, while the eyes of neither ceased regarding; the cardinal held out his hand to be kissed and Aramis kissed the blessed ring after the ecclesiastical method and not as a courtier.

“I see that your rising way is through the aisle and not over the church square!” observed the prelate, panting a little at having found a road out of the plight. “Get your men in the saddle. I shall go as a horseman. I ought to attend the prince’s rising!”

“These men who turn night into day and hospitality into an ambushade do not go to bed at all! Be in time, my lord!”

Another than the minister might have suspected that

this was a ruse to conduct him into a place of seclusion without scandal, and with the pleasant zest of deceiving so artful a man. This escort by obeying their comrade might follow his guidance all the time.

But, dismissing his illness as well as any such doubts, the master of Fleury left in the midst of the royal musketeers as if they were his own and headed by Cavoye. He could see his servants busy in the grounds, and an eye or two up at the stable windows not familiar. Under the hedge, he spied a plume or two, scarlet like a poppy in the holly. And on the cross roads, his sword drawn and laid across the saddle bow, his musketoon by his flank, a musketeer outpost sat like a statue, in the morning haze, only letting them pass on Aramis giving him a signal.

For his good or harm, Fleury was occupied by the king's men.

At the old stone cross, having left Porthos' force behind, they found Athos posted. His men were on both sides of the green fence. Their commander came to the barrier and saluted his younger comrade as if he saw nobody else.

"I am lieutenant now," said the young man. "Under his eminence's orders we are escorting this gentleman to Montheureux."

"Ah," returned the Count of La Fère with his sad smile; "how a little time reverses things: to be the hunted and become a hunter!"

"Yes; but I am afraid that we shall uselessly hunt for a breakfast there!"

“Such a force would take my appetite away if I were the receiver there!”

“I shall breakfast on the way to town, if I am met with the empty trencher! Send a vidette if you hear nothing of me!”

“Count on me! but I want to know more how your new commander fares than you!”

Saluted, all the line, the party passed on.

“While you are a musketeer with the air of a choir boy!” said the cardinal, amusedly, “there is one with a sovereign prince’s.”

“Athos! Yes, I believe he is sovereign lord in his own county; but a disappointment in love turned him loose; he took the uniform, as a soldier is not obliged to wed every woman who turns her head to look at him and turns his head!”

“Were you, too, disappointed by the worshiper who preferred you to the half-pay officer to dispense her holy water?”

Aramis laughed freely, as the birds in the hedge, and his companion inhaled the sunny air as if he came out of a dungeon.

“I?—I who have not yet begun to love!”

“Oh, a heart is never untenanted—I shall not name anyone, but I know of one who had ambition in his heart, first of all!”

The young soldier shifted in his seat as if he were galled; no man liked less to be read.

They met on the road but the peasants. The hunt was

becoming general; though forbidden usually, these carried obsolete firearms with stick rests; they might be recruits going to muster.

“It is more than a battue!” remarked the church prince. “It is a long step between those weapons and your finished ones. Poor dullards, they are capable of mistaking your plume for a fox’s brush!”

“Yes, my lord, but while the fox cannot reply in kind, my friends can!”

It was seven in the morning when they reached the hunting lodge.

Yet the drawbridge was down, and the portcullis raised out of sight. Many servants were about the yards as if expecting a busy day. By their neighing, the horses were considerable in number and new to their place in the stables. The clothes on the men were brushed and decked with ribbons and flowers. Many were furbishing weapons as if they might need more than butcher knives for the game.

But Richelieu, having made sure that the musketeers were close behind, rode straight in at the portals, without letting the scene diminish the glow on his cheeks from the morning air. Aramis threw himself to the ground to hold his stirrup, and not wait for the dumfounded porter. The latter almost recognized the cardinal, but this plain attire dumfounded him. The minister alighted with the grace he possessed, then, as the premier might be supposed to come direct from the king, none dared even question if he were to be admitted.

All the doors flew open, indeed, and accompanied by Aramis, the potentate passed, the ushers and lackeys, hastily drawing back. At the sleeping place of the Duke of Anjou alone the gentlemen at the post would not give way.

“His highness is no more than risen,” explained the guards’ captain. “He will try on a new hunting suit from his own tailors for the grand hunt.”

“My dear marquis,” said Richelieu, taking him by the gorget much as one picks up an oyster shell to see if a pearl is clinging underneath, “pray have the king’s first minister announced!”

With that he pushed by Lord Laigues, and, as the ushers thought the latter had spoken in that high voice, they repeated:

“His eminence, the cardinal-duke!”

The gentleman at the inmost door mechanically repeated it, but already the visitor was at his elbow, and eluding his attempt to bar the opening door with his wand of office, entered the bedroom.

Prince Gaston was sitting by the bedside, with one stocking on, and with his nightdress ready to slip off; the officers holding his day apparel at the wood fire to air it, while he contemplated, with a fop’s idolatry, a hunting costume set on a dummy frame at a little distance in the window light.

The surprised man looked, black without his cosmetic and powder, a picture of dismay. His countenance proclaimed in every moist pore that the news from town was

true to a letter. He could not have been more strongly convinced, this intruder, if the other two princes were behind the curtains.

“Mercy!” ejaculated the young duke, while the gentlemen held the linen with shaking hands. “You look angry, to me!”

“Angry with you? Oh, my dear lord, fie!” was the reply. “Yet have I not grounds to be angry with you!”

Gaston was easy to terrify, and he looked around for support. All he saw prominent was another unexpected guest: Aramis, in his cassock with the royal emblem displayed, filled up the doorway, having given Capt. Laigues, marquis though he was, a look petrifying him. The fact is the marquis had looked out of window and saw the musketeers towering over the throng on their black horses. He believed that there would be wholesale arresting.

“How can that be?” stammered Anjou, completely bewildered.

“Because you would not do my household the honor to command the hunting breakfast! You even send your own officers of the kitchen. So that my cook will commit suicide and his assistants transfix themselves on their long spit! All of which indicates that your royal highness wished to be fully at home under my roof. Hence, I have vacated Fleury, lock, stock and barrels, ha! ha! and the cellar is a good one with its stock; if the kitchen is beneath your epicurean friends! I abandon Fleury, I repeat, for you to dispose of it utterly at your whim!”

Anjou gasped with amaze.

He felt like the player hit by his own ball between the eyes.

“I see by your eyes watering,” resumed the cardinal, with a fatherly tone, “you are catching cold, while I am explaining. Allow me to prove that in all ways I am your lordship’s very humble servant!”

So saying, without an atom of the illimitable pride attributed to him, the king’s chief adviser took the shirt from the valet’s hands, who nearly let it fall, to scorch in the fire; and, almost by force, for a second gentleman of the dressing department tried to intercept, he scarcely waited for the nightrobe to be removed before he muffled the royal head in the cambric. The prince was as white and cold as marble. If he had been strangled in those holy hands at that moment, when a prince is helpless as poor mortality, he would have died believing he was getting his deserts at last. Richelieu made a profound bow, and, retiring, while still in the eaves, reached the door, where poor Capt. Laigues and Aramis were exchanging a glance which meant they were deadly foes hereafter.

Turning in the anteroom, he shouted, in the voice of one who wished to emphasize his great inability—through his abominable weak health, to participate in the sport of the day—saying nothing of his religious office:

“A delightful pastime, my lord! only, beware of the red boars! The clowns aver that the monster of fable roams the moor and that is ugly game to run up against!”

Gaston foamed at the mouth like going into an epileptic

fit; he rolled himself up in the bedclothes as if he was a boy again and had seen the bugbear of the nursery. But he tore the coverlet with his teeth and swore so that the linen almost smoked through his muffings, though, he heard the gallop of horses and guessed that his prey had fairly escaped.

“Marquis, you, a captain! Captain of my guards!” shrieked he, in his *deshabillé*. “Why did you not cut him down when he was within your reach?”

“Cut down a priest? But your highness did not see what I saw out of that window! He came, the coward, with a company of the musketeers! I always said that that corps furnished the bullies who slew our poor Louvigny and disabled Rieux and a lot more!”

“Ah, the game is up!” moaned Gaston, pacing the room without accepting any article of dress, his attendants following him. “Here,” and he caught up the now-offensive dummy in the hunting costume in his arms and threw it out of the window. “Let the baffled dogs worry that!” And he flung himself down on the bed, vociferating threats against king, cardinal and all the musketeers from the captain to the groom who dusted their coats.

“Call the doctor,” said Laigues. “It is clear that his highness is indisposed to go hunting!”

Dr. Besançon was not only the medical adviser but a composer of comic songs. He saw a magnificent subject here, but he could not indulge in his vein. He prescribed absolute rest. To vex the patient to whom rest was ordered, news trickled in during the day, irritating in every

drop. Not informed of the mishap detaining their chief, the hunting men had strayed over to Fleury, scenting the banquet. But Porthos and his detachment had fallen with complete circumvallation on the train of cooks and cookery and gathered in every bottle and pie dish. The environs of the manor resembled Strasburg after being sacked and the glory of that city, the fat-liver pie, gorged by the pillagers. Broken glass and dented platters lay around like the shards of devastated Jerusalem.

Moreover, as the country gentlemen and the nobles from town had taken in huff the challenges of Athos' pickets along the road, clashes had occurred, and the descendants of the Normans were obliged to confess that the tricks of fence in the musketeers' barracks surpassed their devices.

No prisoners were made. Porthos' men were slow and languid as a gluttoned boa-constrictor, and they lingered to be the rear guard. Athos was not alarmed about them, as they were men of bulk like their leader; and the Gastonets, not liking to disturb such heroes of the table at digestion, did not, like the yeomen of "Rabelais," try to "teach them to eat cakes."

Hastening, Athos caught up with Aramis. He, no doubt, could give a good guess as to the identity of the strange cavalier under a horse cloak and with a flap hat, but he saluted him as a gentleman of his friend's acquaintance enjoying this formidable company to town.

To baffle spies, for pursuit was not apprehended, the two corps parted to cross the Seine variously.

Aramis had to pass under the brow of Magdaleon Hill—a mound of cylindrical form, very conspicuous. It was one of the castles which Richelieu demolished, but the religious sisterhood, obtaining the land, had had the stones used again for their convent.

“The Broken Heart’s Sanctuary!” said Aramis, to whom it was a new scene. Having the religious houses under his charge, the cardinal was at no loss to define this establishment and he graciously did so.

In the reign of Henry IV., a beauty rivaled with the selected enchantresses of Queen Marie, the “flying squadron,” one Daisière, called countess without there being a count, “experienced grace,” after the assassination of the king. She turned as stern as she had been facile and as bigoted as uncontrolled. She corresponded with faded lusters of the court and founded a hermitage for those palled with fashion and frivolity. This asylum contained blighted dames of her rank, if not all of her exceptionable charms.

The cardinal contemplated this edifice, gray without and the interior white with lime, as a peep allowed to be seen. He had been informed that this refuge was one also for old hates and spites opposed to his ideas of ameliorations and reform.

He promised himself that he would investigate.

But as he was going to move on, all the corps were astonished to see the way blocked by a mounted man. Like them, armed in full, he held up a musket in a very earnest

mode and occupied the gorge by which the progress was made, under command of the ex-castle, become abbey.

Aramis pushed forward to shield his companion, and to him the horseman cried:

“Halt there! None go! Denounce yourself!”

“King’s men! Denounce yourself—or——”

The grooms leveled their own firearms. The man was outnumbered, generously, but he remained motionless, only he called out in surprise:

“Soul of my body, it is M. Aramis, I do believe!”

“Wonder on wonder! it is my friend’s man—M. D’Artagnan’s!” exclaimed the musketeer, with as much surprise.

On this, the man pinched his gun match to quench it and hung his gun on the hooks. His broad but astute features beamed with a smile.

“How glad master will be to see you, sir! and in force, too! for I believe that a half-dozen soldiers will come in good stead!”

Aramis stared, but in the gloom nothing to bear out this remark was visible.

“Your master here? What business has he here—here? Has he a broken heart?”

“It is no joke, sir; it looks like broken heads!” and Planchet was but part jocular.

“What a tiresome droll you are! Where is he?”

“Over there, at the nunnery gate; protected, like the rest of us, by a counterscarp! But haste, he will be more overjoyed to see you than ever!”

“I do not understand this meeting,” observed Aramis, to the cardinal, for he knew nothing of the queen’s mission; “but it is a dear friend across the way. May I ascertain how he comes here to be held in check by a convent door?”

“Go! Little checks irritate one!”

The musketeer outstripped the servant and was speedily at a ruined bastion, beyond which ran a paved way, narrow but straight, leading under a deep archway, all remains of the ancient fortalice.

He recognized D’Artagnan in the soldier standing there, and leaning down, he unfolded his arms to embrace him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN WHICH D'ARTAGNAN IS MET WITH FIRE AND WATER.

Acting Capt. Guitaut did not like the look of the country, what with the peasants having a holiday and taking up arms as if ready to be called in to the aid of the hunting party. So, on spying at last the religious mansion pointed out as the object of their royal mail service, he relegated D'Artagnan to go on and deliver his letter while he reconnoitered. But to his amaze, his young officer returned almost immediately.

He looked chopfallen. With his growing inclination to be wary, listen to reason and curb his vehemence, he allowed that fancy of his to take the bit and race on. He had that vainglorious feeling that as things turned out, he was favorite of fortune.

Such men, when, in the steady gale and on a smooth sea, they are checked by the wind shifting or falling dead calm, or they strike a reef, regard the deterrence as personal slight.

The porter of the Visitation Convent, his rest broken by the peasants' halloaing and the hunting horn blasts, received him with ill humor. He claimed that to demand a lay sister at their house was a practical joke of the friends of the profligate Duke of Anjou, and on the young soldier displaying the queen's letter, mocked at the seal as a Spanish device and shoved a gun into his face through the

little trap in the gate door, giving him five minutes to get out of range or be blown to pieces, he and his letter.

The courier returned to his superior, believing he would resent this insult to his beloved mistress.

But, in the meanwhile, the captain's picket had taken in hand a skulker who, thinking this party was upon his tracks, confessed without any pressure that he had been one of a body to carry, on a hand barrow, a lady from the convent to another such house at Magdaleon Hill.

He was so enthusiastic about the beauty, of the kind of prisoner, that the young man had no doubt that the transfer was part and parcel of the Duke of Anjou's determination to keep this important witness about the Sansforain murder under his own knowledge only.

"You are right," said Guitaut. "Not that the Sansforains, unknown at court, are bestirring themselves for revenge, but that luckless Pontgibaut has an avenger in the Count of Ludes, strongly supported, who has dared to accuse Chalais of not only that slaying, fair or not, but as well of participation in the outrage under the palace!"

"All this time," remarked the guardsman, "I am holding this letter!"

"Well, take five men and a brigadier, along with this rogue, and find this convent of baked tarts——"

"Sisters of the Sacred Broken Hearts, please you, captain!" faltered the peasant, who saw that he was to lose the day's sport.

"Show this, my ensign, the right road or—pistol at his ear all the way, ensign!" said Guitaut. "I will follow

you and join at Annelles, but I must scout! The whole country is in a ferment and those musketeers, fresh from town, may fall into a pitfall such as these rustics contrive!"

As the peasant wanted to finish with his enforced task, he conducted the squad by little known paths, and they were soon at the same convent which had aroused Cardinal Richelieu's curiosity, some hours later.

This edifice was stronger than the Visitation, but it had a porter, as meek and affable as the other had been gruff and demonstrative of bellicose means.

But the young soldier's intimacy with Parisian life was of no avail in judging convent inhabitants. While mild and agreeable, the porter was as obdurate about admitting the bearer of the queen's warrant for the delivery of the fair widow transported here, as the other about admitting he had ever known of such a ward.

It is difficult for a swordsman to argue by club law with a man behind oak and iron, and all the latter would yield in was to carry the letter to the lady superior.

But D'Artagnan was not so often in the habit of carrying a royal writing to easily let it be free of his hand, and he stated that it and the carrier were inseparable.

"In the queen's name," reiterated the unfortunate guardsman, but as if it were a charm of which he doubted the potency.

He could not see what the porter in the darkening corridor did, but he guessed that he was shaking his head.

"I cannot bring the abbess to this door," said he, "for she has shunned all court and social etiquette, and would

not, for health's sake, come into this cold hold to converse with a military gentleman!"

"Let another come! Better than all, the young lady herself!" despairingly urged the pleader. "She is not a novice! she is a widow. She can be bound by no rules under your roof!"

"Pho! that is the very thing which is forbid!"—the man being so badgered as to be incautious.

"Ha! it is clear! they want to suppress her—to stifle her testimony!" cried the Gascon, slapping the door with rage.

The warder, perhaps thinking that the hand would next come in his direction, clinched, slammed the wicket tight and his steps were heard going away in the lobby.

"Was ever such a pinch!" sighed the other, plucking at his chin down till it pained, and he desisted. "Guitaut is an old bird who excused himself knowing that these nunneries are impregnable and have dragons at the door! And I, in my gull-like state, thought that the name of king and queen would make doors open as if struck by Porthos' shoulder! I should want our whole *corps d'élite* to storm this castle of a monastery! Or no! what could a regiment do where the defending garrison are old prudes and demure nuns? It would not only be unwarlike but unmanly!"

He beat his breast as if he were a penitent before a shrine.

"Now, if that sermonizing Aramis were by, he could

tell me how to deal with nuns, which I fear more to face than guns!"

All he could do was to station himself here on the doorstep, and send to Guitaut to tell him he had lodged the hare but could not extract it from the warren.

The rattle of the wicket reminded him where he stood, with empty hands, bar the letter. As before, the warder appeared as far as his face; if anything it was more pleasant than before.

"Oh," said D'Artagnan, relieved, "you have come to listen to reason!"

"No, sir! it is you who should listen to reason!"

"Then, the lady superioress!"

"Her ladyship stands to it that she will transmit her majesty's letter to the Baroness Sansforain; but that she cannot under the rules of the order, allow male foot to cross this blessed threshold!"

"But you have male feet, have you not?" protested D'Artagnan.

"I! I am nephew of a deacon and recommended by the bishop! Besides, I am the porter, and never go beyond the end of the hall! If you came here to poke fun at my feet——"

"Not at all!" replied the Gascon, with a voice which would have mollified Lucifer five minutes after he landed from his fall out of Paradise. "I will pay for a pair of holiday shoes for them!"

"Thank you, sir, but I belong to the novitiate or bare-footed penitents!"

“Your manners are those of a bear, anyway!”

“Sir, if you think this is the way to enter, you——”

“Now, do not mistake me! I am going to send for my instructions! Meanwhile, I stay here, understand! I and my comrades, allowing no one to quit or enter this house while at my post! If you want your baker, and milk, and begging sisters, to come and go out, as the case may be, it will be only after I have retired my force! I depart only with that lady in my charge!”

“Oh, you beseige us, then?” cried the porter, becoming no less bland and yielding. “You would starve these excellent women? Ah, what a time when the Spanish cross the border; you, gentlemen of the guards, besiege a nunnery!”

“Yes, and stop dubious traffic in which you janitors indulge, so I have heard.”

“Sir, you annoy me! and insult the respectable fraternity of doorkeepers!”

“I am delighted to annoy you in return and in ecstasy, up to the eyes, at insulting you, living hindrance to a poor captive seeing the world!”

“Oh, is it thus? Allow me to tell your worship that while a child of the Lamb would not hinder you and your swaggering wolves in buckram camping down here under the noses of the maids and damsels of the fold, this is our day for flushing the moat. If the mud is more unsavory than that of Paris, of which we hear high and strong language, and your worshipful’s boots are splashed over, it will be your own misfortune, for the world is a

wide one, and the supply of water from the Andelles is not equal to the Great Nilus, which holy writ saith watered entire kingdoms and drowned Pharaoh's army!"

The wicket slammed with a fierceness which made the man on the wrong side clap his hand protectively to his nose.

D'Artagnan intuitively looked at the moat—Rubicon of his fluctuating destiny, who knows? It had a low level, but the yellow and seething mass of rotting weeds began to rise as if innumerable eels heaved under it. The scum broke up and bubbles swelled and burst like "snowbroth" in a freshet; the tide increased till it promised to be bank level.

Presently he could appreciate, with a military engineer's admiration, the ingenuity and precision of the design of that hollow way. It was sunken that the excess of the ditch might flow into it.

In a short while, his stand would be untenable. For a time he might keep dry shod by stepping on the door-sill, but his head would be in perilous proximity to the wicket.

The last phase of the porter's face did not reassure him as to the possibility that a blunderbuss were not as inseparable an article of a porter's outfit, even in a convent, as a broom.

Repulsed by fire in the first instance, he now yielded to water. What intensified the gall was that his men, who had before sympathized with him in retiring before the bullet, badly concealed their smiles at his fleeing before

the torrent, and stepping on the paving stones like a lady on pattens in the Paris gutter.

When on dry land he looked back and saw that a pond shone between him and that forbidden door.

“Provided Guitaut can send a crew of seamen, we could assault this floating convent!” he dryly said. “A deluge recur to swamp it! Our Lady Sansforain must be getting valuable to some folks that they keep her cooped up somewhere. I always had such a love for freedom myself that my fingers itch to let out caged birds. Hang me, but I long to liberate the duke’s captives in the nunneries!”

Our cadet had set out in life with the purpose to even up his qualities; cultivate the defects and prune the exuberances. He was trying to be as imperturbable as that aristocratic stoic, Athos, but this aqueous reception was turpentine on a smoldering brand.

At such adversities, one would quarrel with his heaviest debtor; yet it is poor policy to differ with one’s wanted assistants. Still, as he looked for an object on which to vent his ire, was fain to do so upon the peasant who had led him into meeting this second repulse. Just then——

“Halt there!” in Planchet’s strong voice. “Denounce yourself!”

There was a troop of horse on the road.

“Can they be the Gastonets, with whom that porter classed me?” self-questioned the guardsman. “By the hands that carried St. John Baptist’s head, I do not want them to add themselves to my mocker in there!”

But he recognized the horse and coat of the royal musketeers, and immediately one of his friends, into whose arms he fell as if rescued from his humiliation.

“Congratulate me,” whispered the pious warrior, “I believe my fortune is made. Athos, Porthos and my humble self have aided a great personage!”

“Deplore with me, lucky friend! My fortune is a-wash! I have not even saved my soles from being soaked!”

And pointing to the pool, enlarging into a lake, he related his dilemma.

CHAPTER XIX.

DOORS ARE NOT MADE, FOR SOME PERSONS.

In the companion to Aramis the guardsman saw but the acquaintance picked up on the road. Besides, he was full of his own woe.

“Ugly!” noted the musketeer; “since the queen’s name does not go, suppose we try the king’s?”

“Useless! I doubt the royal trumpets would shake that wall. Far less that porter! But you will need a trumpet to roar across that foaming Styx.”

“Patience, my young wad of tow a-fire! I have studied engineering a little. I remember, in the authors, something about the system of sluices and drains. For simplicity, where water is let in, there is placed the control of the two flows.”

He sent two servants to inspect the moat to the farther end.

They must have found a water gate, for presently the water ceased to overflow; then it began to lower and, shortly, it would be no higher than covered the bottom of the cutting.

“Capital!” said the guardsman, “I must read engineering!”

An old boat, fallen to pieces, supplied planks laid in a line up to the door so that the parleyer could reach it without being mired. The water had receded, but the sunken

way was a sheet of mud. The dainty cavalier went up to the portals, watched by the young soldier and by the man in the cloak.

Aramis on duty had no respect for the holy structure; he banged on the studs in the oak with his pistol butt. The sound and its echoes penetrated the vaults as if to awaken the dead in the private cemetery. Somebody came, though the porter had not been likely to obey. But it was a woman's face that appeared at the aperture.

It was feminine as the Witch of Endor was of the gentler sex, but the summoner recoiled, muttering:

"I do not know if the garden of the Hesperides is beyond, but this is the griffin who guarded that!"

It was a woman taller than he, raw-boned, strong and scowling, such as would be chosen to master lunatics in a madhouse.

"Sir—or madam!" said the polite musketeer, "I beg you to open!"

"Oh, in the queen's name, as before?"

"Well, no! let us suggest the king's for a change!"

"It is not for the better! What business can the king's man have here in a house of women devoted to a higher service than his?"

"Do you not see my insignia, dark as it is? Well, a word with your abbess!"

"She has retired for the night. So have they all! Come to-morrow on the king's business—or your own! It will not matter, for you will be refused similarly—only, you

will be refused by the regular day janitor! It will dull the asperity!"

"Decidedly," thought Aramis, "this is a griffin, and with a tendency towards wit! I am an officer of the king," spoke he, "and the king's business is not limited by time! Either I to the superior or the Baroness of Sansforain to me, and straightway!"

As to prevent the slide being drawn, he had stuck his pistol barrel in the hole and his tone was threatening; it was a tolerably ticklish situation for a man, woman or griffin.

"I am not going to check the tears of a weeping widow at this hour!"

"Be it so! you will have tears of your own to pour out, though I doubt you do much weeping! In three days, the folded lamb will be dissevered from this flock. His most Christian majesty has powers over all ecclesiastical corporations in his realm, ever since his predecessor, St. Louis, and to let the queen have her goddaughter, he will dismantle this convent as he did the castle before it and send you all packing to the four corners of the earth!"

The griffin grinned at the little square gap.

"Anyone can see you are a soldier—you do not understand church matters——"

"The deuce I—that is, the mischief if I do not! Let me tell you that it is the king's privilege, the queen's—mark that!—and all the children of the royal families of France to have entry into all convents and right of free speech with all the nuns!"

“There are exceptions,” retorted the argumentalist, nodding her head waspishly, “and letting that slide, you are neither king——”

“Still less queen, I grant!” Aramis hastened to say.

“And none of the family! Furthermore, it is not so much your going in but who shall come out! This woman whom you burn to see in there is not a nun—she is an inmate! So!”

“Are you a learned doctor, by chance?”

“I am a deaconess, special delegate from a court Christian, and certainly more than a lay brother!”

“I cry your pardon! Going by the voice and the mustache, I thought you were not a lay sister!”

“Not a lay figure, sir! I am a sister, though, to Lady Fontevrault, see that! I am the Dame Monacal, who wrote the tractate, ‘How the Rev. Father Laplume Has Not a Feather to Fly With!’ ”

“You wrote that famous syllogism?” cried Aramis, in rapture, although he had never heard of the paper in his life.

“It is all my work!” said the griffin, slightly less reserved.

“So much the better——”

“Eh!”

“Yes; you might be a poetess—authoress is sufficient! If you will open, I will bow to your genius! We can, then, discuss like scholars not with the wood between us, but within ‘the wood’—hem! Plato! Metaphorically, I

lay aside the sword for I write, sometimes! Before I slipped off the ladder, I was Abbé Herblay!"

"Ah?" as if trying to recollect.

"Oh, I have perpetrated just a few madrigals, somewhat in levity—and not published!"

"It is so with my tract!"

Dame Monacal emitted a sound between groan and gurgle which was probably a griffin's sigh.

"Bless you! Now, if you wish to see it in print, and read it in your own cell with elbow room, instead of in those confoundedly narrow dungeons of his majesty's strong box called the Bastille of Paris, permit my troubling your superior or having the hand of the baroness in mind!"

"You may be a good poet, but I maintain that your range of ecclesiastical law is limited! Do you not know that there are religious establishments independent of the king?"

"Oh, I have heard of the Exclusive House! Do the Broken Hearts derive constitution from the papacy direct!"

"Solely! Go and study the glossary of the papal bulls, and with that, good-evening, abbé-musketeer, my orison is—make a shift back to your first trade!"

"Stay!" gasped the solicitor, in a dying voice, since literary flattery had no effect on a griffin; "then you do not recognize Louis XIII. as head of the church in his realm?"

"Not if he were the three hundred and thirteenth!"

"Yet, stay! you will save yourself some steps, since

there is another to wrangle with you in matters ecclesiastical!"

"Not that soldier, whom we were obliged to drown out, with his brutal arguments?"

"No, I beg to introduce another, ever in the robe, whose reasoning will, I affirm, be pellucid, forcible and carry convictions—I might say, condemnation!"—in an ominous tone.

The learned deaconess was at last impressed.

"I do not object to waiting to hear your advocate! All debate comes in as a tidbit to one who is under a vow of silence! My supper cools, it is true, but it is porridge, and it is good frigid!"

"Oh, my pleader's argument will be hot!" With which promise Aramis tripped back to his party.

He related his repulse to D'Artagnan in such a voice as would inform Richelieu, who set to meditating.

The guardsman, almost laughing at another in like distress, said:

"So you still hope? Well, faith is not disagreeable in our friends' failings!" Had he written this, he would have anticipated Rochefoucauld.

"Comrade, I own that this porteress is intractable! I would try her by promising to have her pamphlet printed, but I cannot find funds for my own first essays in rhyme!"

"If she is an author and we are penniless, it is hopeless. And yet you are so seductive!"

"My dear, it is a new kind of griffin, the claws and eyes of the owl and the face of a cat."

"I am sorry to leave the poor baroness in such claws! But I must wait for my captain to come up and advise!"

"Since you can do nothing in the queen's name and the same with me in the king's, why not have recourse to another name of might, the enemy's!"

"The devil's?"

"No, no! Everybody's enemy, as Prince Gaston, your doomster, is everybody's friend!"

"You do not mean the cardinal——"

"—Duke? Yes, I do!"

"What has he to do with Gaston's freaks? He has no finger in the pie out of which was to leap this sweet, mateless bird, to charm the king, has he?"

"No, but Richelieu has no ingratitude in his nature! Now, while not caring a fig-eater for the bereaved baroness, he recalls that Pontgibaut is kin to the Count of Ludes, and Ludes, when the duke was a simple gentleman, son of an adventurous captain, helped to insinuate him into the old queen's cabinet, where he emerged secretary of state!"

"Oh, how you are all intermarried in France!" sighed the Gascon, who had not a tie unless he made one. "But if it is true that the minister is an obelisk of gratitude, it is he who should help me out in this intricacy!"

"Oh!"

"Because the queen, being informed that the latest plot is to pivot on the premier and the pivot pin to pierce him, went out of her way, out of her fixed moods, and communicated to Capt. Treville the cue that——"

"Hush!—no, I mean speak up loudly!" cried Aramis,

delighted at the ray of light, "so the warning which saves the great steersman of the ship of state emanates from your royal mistress?"

"Out of her good heart! for I will maintain that Anne has a good heart, though she is weighted with Austria and France like a horse carrying 'correctives' in each saddle pouch!"

Aramis looked at the silent rider in his cloak, who replied, with a sign of complicity:

"You are right," said he. "Where king and queen fail, his eminence may prevail! Amen! As we cannot stay here in this damp at the risk of a cold in the head, and I abhor that vulgar complaint, the 'snuffles,' let us have my friend here try his passport to enter into that repulsive building."

D'Artagnan gave the stranger more attention than heretofore on its being stated that he had a key to this obstacle.

"Oh, your acquaintance——"

"The abbé's friend, sir," broke in the third party, in a low voice, which made the hearers thrill as a glass vibrates at certain bass notes. "Your friend, too, since you serve that queen who, indeed, is to be farthered in her desire to become one with the French! Oh, they say one of the hindrances is the king's adviser! You will mark how much I seek to have the queen's wishes carried out—and her protégée shall be carried out to her majesty by you, her guard!"

With a steady step, unlike the slippered priest's, he paced

the string of planks and stopped at the door so long fixed and immovable.

All the musketeers started after the figure so confidently confronting the riddle.

Richelieu removed his riding glove and with a ring on his main finger scratched several times with a squeaking sound the pane of glass in the wicket. The latter flew open with an alarcity not imaginable to the previous experimentalists.

“Whew!” said D’Artagnan, “the baroness can breathe again!”

“Ah!” said Aramis, triumphantly, “the church forever!”

“Oh, oh!” faltered the griffin, seeing a totally different applicant than the two foregoing, and impressed by the peculiar mode of demanding admission, or at least a hearing.

In point of fact, the speaker, being in the dark, and what light there was transpiercing the glass was checked and slightly refracted by the scratches Richelieu had made with his ring. Those scratches were not made at random, at least chance does not often trace the Roman initials which stand in the Latin for: “In the name of the Father!”

She was impressed by this hieratical means of enforcing admission.

“I—I expect now that you do not come in the name of the king or the queen?”

“Sister, I come in the name of the holy father!” was the rejoinder in Latin, with stress on the latter words.

This reply was so satisfactory or compulsory on the learned writer of the famous tractate, that bars and bolts were heard being undone with feverish haste. Both folds of the massive doors were unfolded as to majesty itself, and as if a coach were to be driven in.

“So ho!” mumbled the guardsman, “we have at last somebody in France who goes in where king and even queen are denied!”

Aramis did not reply, but laid his finger on his fine lips.

The doors closed on Richelieu entering.

As if he had been the architect, he stepped up the passage and only paused before the porter’s box. But the way beyond was no longer gray, but black.

“Lights!” said he, as if in his own house and a servant was delinquent.

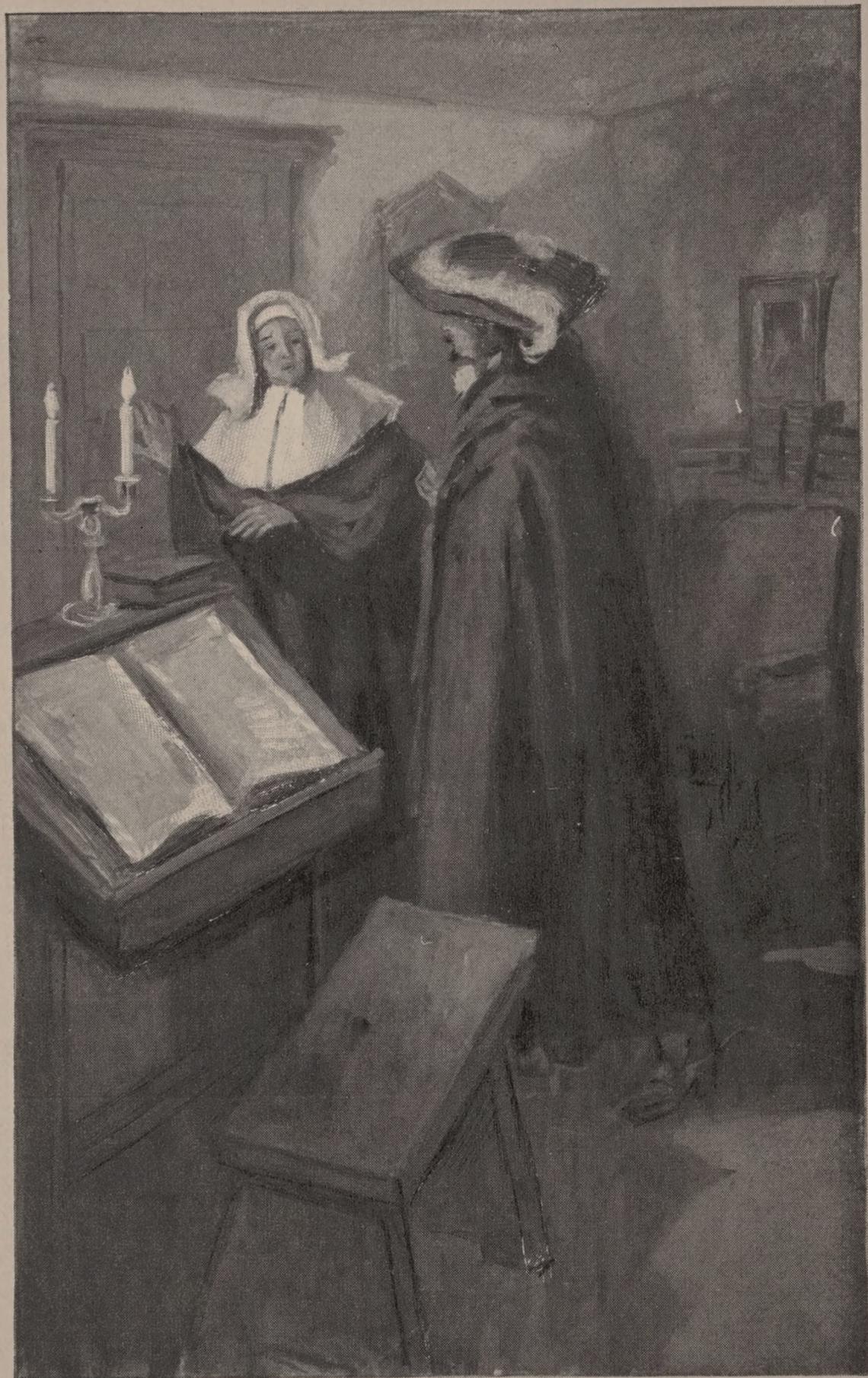
But the porteress was overcome; she sank into the porter’s wadded chair as if palsied.

Two other strong-looking women, wearing coarse gowns, with their arms bare for energetic support of the janitress, came out of the side room; they had a thick candle in a heavy, brass stick a-piece.

Richelieu held up his hand with the fingers in a certain position.

“To the lady superior,” said he, advancing.

“Praying—the sister on night duty is to be seen,



“I am one who calls at any hour! Woe to those found sleeping!”
(See page 229)

though!" ventured the tamed griffin, leaning forward in the chair.

As if she had not spoken, the visitor repeated:

"To the superior!"

One of the light bearers spoke to a woman within another grated door which was opened; the other, bowing, let the man pass and followed so that he was between the lights. Conducted up a flight of stone stairs, where certainly riding boots had not struck with their spurred heels, he was left in an antechamber. A woman was reading out of an immense folio held on a praying stand; Porthos could not have held it on his shoulder for five minutes.

The two nuns stood outside the last door, for the stand had tapers burning for the reader.

"The superior!" said the intruder, again.

The reading woman answered, perplexed at this stately apparition:

"The mother is sleeping or praying for us. I—I—she ought not be disturbed!"

"I am one who calls at any hour! Woe to those found sleeping!"

"Oh, you are the Bishop of Luçon?" saluting.

"Nigher the throne!"

"The archbishop?"

"Still nigher!"

"Oh, *Miseracorda!* the cardinal-primate!"

"The superior!" as if for the last time.

She left him alone.

"Faith of my fathers!" muttered he, proof to the chill

in the stony enclosure, the whitened walls, the cold, blue flags, and the absence of color and warmth, "if even I have a palace and guards, may they be as stanch as these goodly sisters!" He looked at the open volume. "No illuminations? That is an excess of dullness! 'Paraphrase of the Parables!' I would forgive the woman if she had a *novelita* between the chilling pages!"

The reader did not return, but the mother nun presented herself.

She saluted the dignitary formally, but with grace of long practice—the undiminished court dame's bearing.

Richelieu gazed on what little the crossed, white hands allowed visible of the lineaments of the star of Henry IV.'s court. The dazzling complexion was sallow, the lips washed out, the cheeks sunken, but the eyes bewitching.

"She is genuinely converted?" queried he; "we shall judge here solely by her action."

Thereupon, without giving time for any plan of subterfuge to be formed and essayed, he spoke to the point, not in word alluding to her brilliant past, but treating her as lady of a castle, not a convent—one with a broken life, perhaps, but not a broken heart—for one can be mended, not the other. Far from demanding a jail delivery, he seemed but to have called to escort home a lady guest accommodated for a week or two, for her "retreat" from society.

"Sister, the queen desires the company of this poor Baroness of Sansforain. She doubts not the cloister's

tranquillity and your consolation have softened her anguish. This time she will be escorted to town with so strong a guard that she will not be molested. I warrant this. So, on the instant, since my minutes are counted in the king's business, let the lady be notified, let her dress for the ride while I offer my apologies and give my thanks for your speedily meeting my wishes."

Her lips were bronze, though her eyes were incandescent points.

He frowned; he began to reflect if this opposition did not come from complicity with Gaston, for here arose the same opposition only more deeply rooted. He frowned a little less, for he had the clew. This lady was of the Montpensiers, to whose daughter was to be espoused Prince Gaston, lest he married a foreign princess, and so thrust a stick between the spokes of Richelieu's wheel of foreign policy.

"You have one moment to redeem your frowardness," said he, incisively, as from a mouth of steel.

"Your eminence, that young woman is a snare for excess of charm," said the abbess, like a good judge of a rare enthraller; "she is a firebrand to set the very thrones aflame."

She no longer dared be silent, but she sought to dally.

"She is the foremost witness to her husband's murder. She must appear at the trial of his murderers. As you are no longer worldly, this concerns you not a letter."

His tone carried the threat that she must not intervene in politics or suffer the result.

“Eminence, her words being full of revenge and thirst for blood, will bring more than one head to the scaffold and send more than one into prison or exile.”

“Let justice be done. I see that you have been questioning her.”

“There was no need,” replied the ex-court paragon, contemptuously. “Country born, she is effusive and ungoverned. Here, secluded, as among mutes, no noble blood will be spilt on her behalf.”

As she became warmer with debate, her interrogator became colder.

“Blood spilled must be expiated. Blood invokes blood,” he added, in Latin. “What to you, sister,” he asked, abruptly, as a magistrate does to perplex a criminal, “are these Rieux, Harcourts and the dirt-bedraggled fringe of that scapegrace prince’s garments.”

“Little they, but——”

“Do not mislead. You fear that the blood reflowing when that corpse is produced before the murderers, will blot the marriage deed of the Montpensier heiress with the head of Anjou?”

“Your eminence is often right.”

“Enough! Prince Gaston’s head is always dear by its closeness to the one I am vowed to cherish, but even it must fall if marked in God’s avengement of murder. In the meanwhile, do not thrust your hand between the block and the ax. Send me the baroness.”

She trembled. That was a scorching eye on her, and the voice rang like a knife being sharpened on a wheel.

“You owe me now for ten wasted minutes.”

To be in Richelieu’s debt!

“Where is that sister?” cried he, raising his voice so that it was audible in the next room. “I see that I must order here, if only for the sake of discipline.”

She sprang between him and her bedroom.

“I begin to think that you do not acknowledge me chief of our church,” said he, with intense scorn.

“Oh, in France.”

“Who are you to lay down limits, pray?”

“They are laid down. The foundation of the Broken Hearts emanates from the papal chair direct——”

The other looked at her so steadily and effectually that her brain was giddy; she felt as one on a bridge at feeling it quake and dreading that its pediments are giving way.

“Is it the holy father alone who is obeyed here?”

“That is it,” replied she, with her last resolution. “No king, no primate. His holiness alone.”

“Thus, it is plain that your relations with Rome are less intimate than with Anjou. For,” he held out his ring under her eyes, having slid aside the cover to the bezel, which showed St. Peter’s emblem carved in adamant.

“The Fisher’s Ring!” gasped she, recoiling till the wall stopped her and leaving the room door free.

“It is the authorized duplicate—none other.”

“The *alter-ego!*” muttered she, waving her hands before her as though the stone shot blasting beams.

Richelieu was the pope's legate unnamed—the representative of the Vatican in France, perhaps the universe.

Full of spite, she ejaculated:

“You hold here for the pope? You who told Paul a lie about your age when he prematurely made you a bishop! Well might he say, on learning the deception, that you would be a great knave, and you who warred against him for the Valteline. You representative of——”

“Silence! This is not to the point. The baroness, or you no longer have house over your head in Europe.”

That threat might have left her unconquered, but she saw that this man's power was illimitable. She bowed and looking into her room, said, in a tremulous voice:

“Graville!”

The frightened reader reappeared.

“Fly to the boarders' ward. Arouse the Baroness of Sansforain, who should dress for a journey to Paris. Tell her the queen awaits her, to shelter her, for the myrmidons of Prince Gaston are on her track from her last refuge. The queen's own guards await her at the gates.”

The woman hurried forth without presuming to dart a glance at this redoubtable subjugator, who had tamed the tigress in the nun's cloth.

Richelieu gallantly offered his hand to the abbess, but as she had no strength to touch it, he led her to the chair at the reading stand. He looked down on her with humbling pity, and observed:

“Confinement here and uncongenial fare have wasted your tact and insight, poor sister. You would embark on

a vessel which will not arrive at its port. Never—never, while I breathe, shall Prince Gaston be ruler of our country. And, after I shall be no more, Louis XIII. will have a fit successor, or I shall have a fit successor myself—we have looked to both issues. The empire will be shattered. Spain will rot in its rags with the gold thread rubbed out, in poverty, the Lazarus of kingdoms. Italy will grovel in the ruins of palaces and old, imperial tombs; but France! France is the true daughter of the church. She is the true wolf cub, and the old she wolf will nourish her to the end.”

In the fifteen minutes or so, making an hour since the pretended chance acquaintance of Aramis had gone from their sight, he reappeared at the formidable gates. But he was accompanied by a veiled woman whose gait and contour were certainly not the ungainly Griffin's. At the mere turn of the head and the dulled glint of lively eyes through the net, D'Artagnan's heart leaped, as if it would qualify him to belong to the Broken Hearts. Aramis made an elaborate bow, with hat off.

“The queen's godchild!” said the cardinal-duke, as if presenting a protégée of his own.

A horse had been prepared especially for her by the bearer of the letter of invitation now tendered her.

“I expect her to receive the respect which we all owe her majesty.”

They went right on in the night. The churchman rode like a hunter. For the lady's sake, though, the pace was moderated enough for Athos to overtake them, and Por-

thos reached the barriers of Paris before them by having gone straight to the goal, without interruptions impairing his digestion of the Anjou feast.

The whole cavalcade was imposing as it entered the Louvre main gates.

“By the mustache of Mars,” remarked the old corporal under the arch, catching a peep at the lady, “if they have made that captive in their flying trip into Spain, I would I be of the next expedition. I want an idol in my ingle-nook for the winter of my life, with everburning eyes of that luster. It would save me candles.”

Richelieu had his lodgings in the palace as prime minister.

As he formally placed the baroness under the charge of D'Artagnan, he said: “With my compliments to the queen, and, pray, say that I am ever her indebted.”

CHAPTER XX.

THE CONSPIRACY COMES UP AGAIN.

It may be that the prime minister, seldom doubting the extent of his elevation, was already planning his palace bearing his name, but at present he appeared fully content with the ministerial residence. Since Francis I.'s time, the left wing of the Louvre was set apart for the royal counselors, in Whitehorse Court.

His study and library had windows on the Honor Courtyard.

Access to the cabinet was by an anteroom, parted off into two, but showing the high hall, heavy with Italian sculptures in varied material. Here the watchers, ushers and clerks worked too diligently to criticise them.

Although Louis, after the Fleury incident, doubled the detachment of musketeers to preserve his First Man, the latter designed to have a quite independent force. More than on the company he relied on his gentlemen-pensioners. Trained in the use of arms, they were the more valuable for fidelity and intelligence. They were proud of their brand-new insignia, the Richelieu ducal crown and three gold chevrons.

In the reception room were copyists and pages, instructed to be ready to help secure any fanatic, insane petitioner, or the man with a grievance who haunts the

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chief secretary's office with a paper in one hand and a dagger up his sleeve.

In the study itself, decipherers, transcribers and secretaries of the highest characters, labored under the master's eye. They not only assisted him with state papers, but in filling up the blanks in the plays with which he amused himself and furnished the plots; as most were weapons against his enemies, their dramatic worth is nothing compared with the veiled allusions and unfolding of mysteries not easily unriddled by us. Nearest his seat, a vast armchair, was a mahogany table bound with brass at the corners, at which wrote Desmarets, Cheret and that Chavigny reputed to be his son.

Richelieu adored cats, like all fond of the library, of which they are the born protectors against mice. Friquet was brought back, for it was disporting with a grave, long-whiskered Persian puss among shreds of paper—"a parlor tiger."

"I do not know," said Cheret, in one of those notes which ruined him, "whether we are most annoyed by the litter of paper or of his grimalkins."

On the walls were choice paintings, the Richelieu family tree, for he was of good extraction and his father became knight in the royal orders of chivalry; family portraits, and the king's and the queen's.

The last was more likely to rekindle love than foster the passion for reprisal in a jilted man. Anne was splendid in a Spanish ball dress of green and gold embroidery.

Armand Duplessis, first Duke of Richelieu, that great

and gloomy figure overshadowing the coming years, sat at ease, acting as if alone when with his secretaries. Sleeping at will, like all men formed for continuous toil, he was not dozing.

But, like the cat asleep, he was dreaming of the chase.

Father Joseph had assured him that the plot found in Louvigny's last papers was not nipped effectually; on the contrary, it had taken on leaves with new life. Chalais, over whom hung prosecution for the slaying of Baron Sansforain, for he would be the martyr for Anjou, believed that in the prosecution of his scheme was his only means to annul the legal prosecution. Chalais had become a familiar of the Duchess of Chevreuse, that confidante of Anne of Austria, and the shining light of opposition, which lured many a gallant like the favorite into a sea of blood, where he perished.

"It is written here," read Desmarets, "that the duchess ought to be imprisoned."

"It would only embitter her and lead her to scorn of all restrictions."

He had hoped that the restored Anne-Charlotte would displace Lady Chevreuse, but the latter was, perhaps, the queen's confederate, which made her stronger attached than mere confidence and pleasing companionship.

"The count!" was announced.

This count, of the many of that title, was that Count Rochefort, who had been enamored of the young queen, and, like his master, been rebuked; this was a common bond between them. Whatever their aim, the count was

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entirely devoted to him. He was a dark, long-faced man, tall, supple, active to excess. The scar which disfigured an otherwise winsome countenance, said to be the score of a queen's gallant to reprove his revelation of their intimacy, marred all; it had embittered him who could no longer hope to entrance a queen.

Under twenty costumes, which he wore with faithfulness to the character designed, changing age, bearing, speech and his very spirit to suit, he had a finger in all the mysterious deeds of the period.

"The Count Diabolus" took off his gloves—not to show his fine hands, but to take from secret pockets in them pieces of thin paper, to be laid before the two secretaries.

It might be in doubt whether Father Joseph was the subordinate in the church to his apparent superior, or able to dislodge him at any moment, but it could not be supposed that Rochefort was more than the politician's evil genius. But our readers will, we hope, remember him; we made him the mainspring of our previous romance, "The Three Musketeers."

"Your eminence," began he, bowing low, but with the air of being the left-hand man here, if not the right. "We are on the line about that Chalais; he is persistent. He is pernicious."

"Chalais militant," sneered Richelieu, "nonentity, frivolous, vain, vapid. In former times kings had at table a peacock served as the leading dish, for show. Now they have their peacock displayed alive. But without sauce, it is an insipid fowl."

“Which will not always agree with the king. But I have followed up the hint that Father Joseph gave me about the attempt to throw the king from his horse; it could not be Chalais’ work. No!”

“That villain was, perhaps, of no party.”

“I suspect that he is one of those parasites torn from the tree to which it clung and sucked the vitality. Cast down, it writhes like a serpent, and if it can injure by its sap, which is poison, that he will do.”

“Ah! it is these ignoble hands bringing about downfalls of importance, which upset our calculations. An avalanche in the Switzerland starts on its crushing glide by a man shouting good-night to his sweetheart. Man will be man and not spirit till he can foresee and correct these accidents.”

“In a word, Chalais has learned nothing. He has re-embarked on that tumultuous sea called treason.”

“Hoping his lordship will carry him through, of course. This ship is called——”

“Anjou! Only, the adventurer is not on the ship yet; in the skiff which may transfer him to the ship drawing inshore, in case the land is too hot to be pleasant.”

“This skiff?”

“It is Chalais, but the colors he hoists are the Chevreuse!”

“They are two of a pair?”

“As one.”

“Odd, he has been witched. He is not reported as with the duchess. Is he ubiquitous?”

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“Iniquitous! The king, deafened by Baradas’ hunting horn solos, aches to see more of Chalais—it is the duchess who weans him away.”

“Would not the duke constrain this courtier to forbear meeting his duchess on the sly—for, since the lady is forbidden the palace, they must meet in secrecy?”

“I think that the duke winks at it. He is appointed by his lady one of the cabal, and promised half the loaves and fishes by the intriguante.”

“The duke could be glugged, but what does she, the cormorant, count to gain by this warmed-up plot?”

“Spite gratified! I do not know that it is catching, by marriage, but the duchess is widow of that Albert Luynes, first favorite of our Louis, who murdered Concini to oblige his monarch. Now, the Chevreuse woman wishes to induce Chalais, or another dupe, to kill the head of the state.”

He spoke plainly, but he lowered his sharp voice.

“We may let the two collude,” said the duke, “for we can so net them together. But it is impossible to pick up all the threads in such a snarl.”

“Impossible! They are as widely apart as Spain, Holland and Germany.”

“They can be watched everywhere. As for the queen, her correspondence with her brother is read, copied and passed on regularly, eh, Fhavigny!”

The young gentleman among the writers nodded.

Rochefort smiled to himself. On finding that Lady Combalet, the cardinal’s niece, was attendant upon the

queen, and spy, and being shunned for her suspicious connection, consorting with Baroness Sansforain, he had christened them "with their own tears," the two Niobes.

"As for Austria, how far, think you, count, is the Marquis Laisque authorized to compromise his putative father and emperor?"

"He is in the Low Countries. Father Joseph is at home there, in at the holy houses."

"Yes, but why would the light-headed marquis frequent holy houses?"

"Why, theoretically, an ambassador, and he is one; is on his own native soil wherever he stands; but he does not feel insured against a dash of French light horse, which would catch him up by the saddle bow and drop him on our side of the border. So he will confer with the envoy of the prince and the duchess in a place decidedly neutral to all arms."

"A place more inviolate than an embassy mansion? What is that?"

"Any religious establishment."

Richelieu made a grimace; after the adventure among the Broken Hearts, he could not be blamed if not believing few places are invulnerable.

"Wherever the marquis is," said he, "go make his acquaintance. Chalais has his liberty at this hour as under a cloud about the Sansforain affair, and, taking umbrage at the king's inclination toward that bugle player. Can he be active agent of this conspiracy?"

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"He is the weaver's shuttle," said the chief spy, emphatically.

"Then, in time, he must commune with Laisques. You are a Protean man; disguise and stay with Laisques so as to be by at their conference. Catch Chalais with incriminatory papers upon him, and he shall suffer for it, if he should not for the Sansforain matter."

Rarely had he been so energetic.

"Incrminatory?"

"If he involves no matter whom in his detestable web."

Rochefort looked over up at the queen's portrait and delicately scratched the tip of his ear.

"Yes, all!" and the count understood that while he might forgive Anne of Austria, for his scarred face, Richelieu would never do so for the scar on his vanity.

"Laisques is subtle in mind."

"Oh! I shall introduce myself with saintly simplicity. Just as Chalais will plead that he turns on the king for being disfavored, I shall say you are the severest tyrant that ever was, and that I am sick of my monstrous servitude."

"By my faith!" said Richelieu, with that tone of enjoyment which always puzzled his buffoons as to the sincerity, "if you say that to the marquis with that genuine gusto, you will deceive him."

"I am your direst foe. I am full of all the scandal against you."

"Detail some of it, of the freshest!" and he leaned back to relish the budget.

“The very latest is that I cannot overlook your releasing from the custody in which the Duke of Anjou left her, as a trouble feast to the nobility in her wail against her husband’s slayers, that little widow from the south, who has possessed the queen.”

“Come, come, why should I espouse her cause?”

“Not to offend Prince Gaston, but because you see in her the charming companion to while away the time falling heavy by the absence of Chalais and the failing of Baradas to oust him.”

“So this——”

“Aurora of a gay time at court.”

“No, not Aurora; Anne-Charlotte, for she bears the queen’s name, of course. Do you think she has captivated the unimpressionable one?”

“I only know that the king was vexed when, going to Blois, the time he had the Vendomes imprisoned, he found that his queen was not accompanied by the baroness.”

“I can believe anything you say, Rochefort, but, Louis in love!”

“Bah! I was intended for the church, I, myself, for being frigid, and with no more emotion than a paving stone. But——” He glanced up at the royal portrait again significantly and impudently.

“It is true,” said Richelieu, suppressing a sigh, “that rogue, Cupid, has such an arsenal of arrows that sometime or another each gets winged.”

“She is worthy a prince.”

“True, true enough! But,” like one who lifts his voice

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as his friend treads shaking grounds, "hie you to Brussels!"

"I wish to consult Father Joseph, who knows everybody, while I am ignorant as St. Anthony's pig about this son of the archduke who may be an arch devil."

"Learn all you can, but be ready when I have my final instructions. Remember, you must return with Chalais a prisoner. Would you like guards, for the king, since that late event, has sent me forty musketeers more."

"No, I shall go alone."

The next day Rochefort, having learned all he required of the inexhaustible Joseph, started on his errand. He was also instructed by his gray eminence how to wear the costume he adopted for the road; a Franciscan's frock. At the barriers, the guard, not troubling him as a humble pedestrian, he heard a country squire, coming to see Paris, ask the lieutenant of the watch, what was the latest news.

"Does that Chalais still reign?" demanded he, to show that he knew the little bird flew in the palace grounds.

"Yes, Chalais reigns; only, what Chalais?"

"Oh, are there more than one?"

"The king, long life to him! having expelled the count for overpresumption in throwing away a glass from which the king refused a drink, because there was fly in it, fell out of favor. But since the name is delightful to the king, he has replaced the count with his cousin——"

"Oh! if Chalais has a cousin——"

"My dear sir, know that a royal favorite is never alone

in the world. Assuredly, Count Chalais has a cousin—a very pretty cousin, and so, you see, there is no foundation for the tale that it was Lady Combalet in the queen's suite who enchanted the sovereign."

Rochefort bought him a mule and hurried on.

"Chalais is dead," muttered he, "but long live La Chalais!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SPECTER OF THE LOUVRE.

Innovations and modernization so debases and depoetizes a scene that it is next to impossible to repicture the queen's ladies' suite in the long hall, having a painted ceiling with relief stucco figures in a quaint style, paintings let into the wall without regard for the cuttings they made in the fresco, with a great fireplace arched over by bronze and marble, instead of that horrible token of decadence, the sheet-iron wood stove guarded—as if anyone but a horrified artist would steal it away—by old soldiers in dull blue. Cellini would have laid his elaborately chiselled fireirons about their ears.

Although ladies of the highest families, they were portionless, like girls then, and looked for dribblings from the royal purse; but Anne's was flat after the Spanish duennas went through it, and squeezed with the persistency of a prudent nation.

To each side were the dormitories, double-bedded in some cases, and all sordid and furnished.

It was plain that Louis, the King, was not addicted to feminine tendencies, and the queen had no treasurer.

Nevertheless, there was a slight freedom, if you knew how to obtain it. And from the Broken Hearts' Convent, at all events, there was change desirable. The buzz and perfumes of the court penetrated here; the lively prome-

naders in the gardens and of the Tuileries could be seen, and, though the queen was under the dull cloud of her husband's neglect, some foresaw that she would have her high day. Visitors came. If she did not dance cardinals every day, she did have concerts.

It was a terribly painful gantlet to run, this reappearance of Lady Sansforain in the maids and ladies of honors' company; but, she was set apart by her incontestable beauty, her quickness to learn all the turns of the head and hand, arts of the costume and toilet, and with all, a straightforwardness and real goodness of disposition. There are idols which cannot be set in a row, but must have a niche each of its own.

Anne-Charlotte spoke French with the rich, Southern accent, and Spanish like a native, but more musically than any of the queen's fellow countrywomen, which endeared her; but, above all, she sang with that touchingness which makes the delighted hearer careless as to the words.

Her widowhood, however brief, separated her from the maids and she had the knack to be grave enough with the more matronly ladies. But they were jealous of a growing enchanting of the queen, especially since the Duchess of Chevreuse was banished to Lorraine after the Fleury affair. So she naturally gravitated into the company of that other ostracised lady of honor, Lady Combalet.

As Cardinal Richelieu's niece, she was sure to be styled his spy on the queen; it is probable she was the stalking horse to an unrevealed witness. Excluded by the other

ladies, royalist and even Anjouists, she speedily paired off with this latest comer.

When Lady Combalet was often twitted with her uncle having danced to the queen, she answered: "That is nothing but common politeness. I have played to her singing."

So Marie Combalet was not sorry to see Anne-Charlotte take place as accompanist to their royal mistress, read from the Spanish *romanceres*, or sing to her. From her simplicity, she believed she would learn as much as by her assiduous watching.

Suddenly a new phase of the jealousy with which such appendages of royalty visit all additions to their ranks, accentuated Baroness Sansforain's position. It was noised and noisily, too, ere long that the king had singled her out of the bevy as worthy his infrequent worship of the sex.

She, in all plainness, was considered propped by two buttresses; through her friendship with Lady Combalet she had the cardinal's favor, through her acceptance of the king's timid adoration she had the latter's—between crozier and crown.

Without believing her icicle capable of melting, and far less her protégée so ungrateful, the queen let some of her coolness towards Richelieu's relative evaporate upon her bedroom mate.

Who set afloat the history of Louis, the Chaste's, first essay in unofficial lovemaking? Who can tell now? Some master hand of occult deviltry who uses virtue as weapon,

conducted this plot so as to redouble the persecution by which Louis made Anne hate him.

Singularly enough, while Anne looked upon Anjou's endeavor to dethrone his brother with some curiosity, rather than indignation, as we watch two deadly insects fight to the death in a glass, she felt enraged when this young widow, apparently, was trying to usurp her station as wife.

Then Chalais, as if he counted on this kinswoman of his taking his place, had quitted Paris; no doubt, he would return when this Circe had wiled away the lethargic monarch.

The worst was, that the queen was nearly beguiled into giving the Duke of Anjou's agent a token for the emperor's representative, by which he could be identified as the queen's deputy.

Under other circumstances, the new and incontestable beauty would have had all the lady-killers of the capital credited to her; but D'Artagnan, with biting lips, had to hear often and often again that no one dared enter the lists where he might find, when the antagonist's visor was lifted, the head of his king. As no poet sung her, no minstrel serenaded under the dormitory windows, and no jewels or even nosegays flowed to her apartment, it was clear that all waited for the flood to be led by royal offerings.

As the Egyptologists can make their own versions of a scratch or two on a stone, any chance expression of the baroness, any sign or look when the king's name was ut-

tered, all was converted into an avowal of "this first passion of the unimpassioned king."

This hidden impulsions to force the king to compromise Lady Sansforain—for, to her honor, be it said, no one thought that they could incline her in any way—had to culminate soon.

Chalais gone, Baradas evidently a shooting star—a gap which the court fools could not fill—the king could not be distracted.

After a mud bath in the slough of despond, a monarch is apt to take a bath of blood; this black despair was like that into which Louis fell when he had Concini murdered.

But those who based hopes on any passion of his, were puzzled. Anne-Charlotte, though allied to the Chalais, the Montlucs and the Ludes, did not seem to have any close friends who would share in the spoils due to the infatuation.

Certainly, after Prince Gaston's having her husband slain and almost marring her beauty—a greater crime in a woman's sight—never would she assist his espousers. The queen was cool in gratitude since the scandal attaching her to the royal suitor thickened. A Spaniard and a Florentine were similar in not being nice as to a spoonful of poison slipping into the chocolate instead of sugar.

The only other ally she might secure was the cardinal, and her pairing off with Lady Combalet almost ensured that.

There were fawners, who would have thrown them-

selves in the way of the king, perhaps, but none to cross the cardinal.

With the king "mooning," no more gambling, no musical parties, no dancing, and the garden strolls dreary, without light speaking or any laughter, the Jester Langley, caught conspicuously spading up a flower bed and asked why he delved, lugubriously asked in return:

"If one buries 'Good Henry'"—the king's epithet for Chalais—"what will come up?" No one attempted to unriddle. "Oh, another Talle-rond (Talleyrand) that is, a round shoot, or 'sucker,' as gardeners say."

That evening, after the miserable supper, the queen waited upon by her stiff and somber own Spaniards, Lady Combalet, rooming with Lady Sansforain, shut up her spinnet testily and went to peer out of the window. The sky was gray and but little rosy, the garden shadowy and not inviting with their formal arrangement; Louis, in a recent fit of scrupulosity, had ordered some statues which had delighted Francises and Diana of Poitiers, deposed. It made all monotonous green.

"What ails you, dear?" inquired Anne-Charlotte, affected by the outer gloom as much as by the one entering on her soul.

"Heaviness of the head."

"I pity you, if it is like that on my heart."

Lady Combalet sighed.

"It is dreadfully early; what can we do to liven up?"

"We are free here to do what we list, since the queen

said that she should not want us, though it is our turn. The inevitable Spaniards will suffice for her needs."

"I care not to sing 'The Lament of the Moors' or 'The Cid to Ximena.' Rather the canticles I learned in the Carmelite Convent where I took refuge after my husband's death—a man who gave me such a distaste for married life that I lived in a cell and in sackcloth for fear I should be married again against my choice."

This was true, and, still more odd, while she wore sackcloth, she was made attiring woman to the queen and passed among the bedizened ladies in her nun's gown. But this sorry apparel did not daunt her suitors when her uncle became first of the ministry.

"Why has the queen forbid our sauntering in the grounds after dark?" asked the nun turned dame of honor.

"It was Lady Laboissière who said that she had spied by the wall of the rosery all your lovers, the Counts of Sault and of Soissons and Lord de Booze and the Duke of Bethunes."

"My lovers? They might have left out the Sault."

"And the Breezy one, too—that is, according to the queen, who was up in arms for you in a twinkling."

"The queen defending me?"

"Yes, she declared that four lovers were too many—such tales should be believed but by half."

"My dear, cut again. The only card to come out is the Count of Soissons, who will marry me if they can only expunge my having wed that low fellow, Combalet!

My dear sister, whatever you do, never marry beneath you!"

The other sighed, as if she had not fixed her eyes on a duke as yet. The air came in off the garden without a sound.

"What a dull prospect. Who would think this court is in the land of the living?"

"Or loving? Four lovers. If only I could see that one," and she leaned out of the casement, so that her companion seized her to prevent the pretended fall. "Not an owl, even. Oh, how I envy those men. Never are they mopish as long as they can have dice or a pack of cards."

"Have you cards? We might make a game at something or another."

"Being widows, we cannot play 'Old Maids!'"

"We will play the great international game, 'Beat Your Neighbor Out of Doors!' Wait! Who has cards? Oh, the fair Zera. Half a minute."

But more than half a minute elapsed without the card-seeker returning.

"May a gnat bite her!" cried Anne-Charlotte, eventually, "I do believe she saw Lord Soissons on the wall, when she hung out, and he signed her to meet him somewhere, spite of the prohibition. But what cares the cardinal's niece for regulations when he is so great a man. Did not the king send his own mother into poverty because she put herself openly in a plot against the minister? And if the queen does not like Richelieu, the king all the

more remains his friend. Yet what kind of a friend is he? The queen saves his life by a timely warning, and yet he prompts the king to hate her day by day.

“Oh, still Combalet stays away. What a poor guard they must keep out there to let even a great personage like Soissons hang about among the daffodils and sweet-briar. I wonder my own guardsman,” she laughed at the title which no one had heard from her lips, least of all her nominee concerned. “My own watch should let something or other blind him, if he lets the count pass him unchallenged.”

Going to the window once more, but keeping in the shadow, she peered forth. It was so dark now that she saw a light as if a glowworm’s, but it must have been a lantern’s light, and tolerated.

“It’s the turn out of the guard,” reasoned she. “Provoking thing that that D’Artagnan should be given a step, for since he is sub-ensign he only comes with the sentries, once in a while, and departs instanter. As a private, he would be there for his set hours. I cannot even ask news of him from his comrades since the queen denies, and the confounded sharp Donna Esteafania, who knows not what good fellowship is, watches to prevent us chatting with the soldiers; and yet, they are all gentlemen, good as the best old Christian Spaniard.”

Having studied guard-mounting, she noticed a dereliction from the regular method.

“The relieved sentry marches away to the end of the line. That is correct; and—but, but, you are wrong

there," as if she could be heard. "As I live, they have not posted anyone in his stead. They are all going hence. I never! This part of the grounds, under the ladies' windows, it is left unprotected."

The garden became as silent as the two rooms, one each side of her. Lady Combalet might have found the cards. If so, she was playing solitaire with them, for she did not hasten to commence the game with her forlorn companion. She needed the air, yet she closed the window. She had the feeling that something—not a count—might fly in by it. She went out in the hall. There was no usher there, no servant glided in or out. She opened the next room door; no one was in there. She examined two or three others; all were unoccupied.

"How now?" muttered Anne-Charlotte, a little fretted. "Has Combalet been so generous as to share her four hangers-on all around? She might have given me a chance in the distribution, only that loss comes to one with too good a reputation. She was afraid I would fire up at such a gift as a repudiated lover, even a count. Pretty sisters, these companions of mine, to have fun on the board and not to ask me if I had no appetite."

The empty rooms gave her a chill; with their candles unlit and the white beds unruffled. Luckily, to correct her wrong impression, she tried one more door. It was a double-bedded room, that is, with two beds, and while both were occupied by their usual tenants having lounged on them, in their dress, in readiness for a call, they had gone off into slumber. Another and Lady Combalet,

stopped in her quest for cards, and in a possible tryst with the lord of Soissons, had imitated them, and all four or five were indulging in a tolerable but ladylike breathing in the luxury of peace, which, in any but the queen's handmaids, would be called snoring.

"Traitor!" muttered Anne-Charlotte. "Unless this is a trick to stupefy the cardinal's spy. A nice time to doze off when the garden is without any watch."

The company was mute, but it was company. She wished to linger, and yet this universal somnolency was sinister.

"It was not our frugal Spanish salad supper!" muttered she, smiling, for she hesitated to laugh.

Suddenly she shook with terror; she did not wish this sound stupor to embrace her. She tottered out of the room on tiptoe.

But nothing in the lobby enhanced her absurd alarm; only a glint of wan light from the tall windows at each end. A speck of varnish on the wall painting presenting the semblance of an eye, looking for her to return.

Over two doors were busts of Carrara marble, yellowed by the candle fumes; a vestal's and a sage's spectral.

On the other side of the hall was a room where dwelt two of her most-liked sisters, cherished because they came from the south of France, being relatives of the king's guard, Capt. Charost.

They had another lady with them; these three were also in that coma. Their respiration was childlike and



“She was almost instantly petrified. She perceived a hazy form gliding along.”

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regular; but it affected her as much as the others, being so stertorious. It was not normal. This time they were seated; one had a ball of wool in the listless hand, and a cat was uncoiling it unreprieved. Another had in her sudden collapse pushed her finger through a tambour, and the third must have been reading to them; the book was in her lap and her finger closed up in it.

With courage Anne-Charlotte walked into the center of the room, as though defiant of this spirit of lethargy. It was too like the stories of caves into which the adventurer, advancing too far, succumbed to mephitic gas.

"It is a tale of magic," murmured she. "I have it, for it is plain; we were drugged," for she fancied that her head was humming and that a thousand minute specks flowed before her and veiled her sight. "It is an attempt."

In palace jargon, an attempt is one against the monarch's person. This includes his wife and the rest of the family, when there is any.

She had no such vanity as to believe that she, the insignificant, was aimed at.

"The queen is in danger."

Her dread and indignation were not freezing, but fiery. She bounded to the door like one hasting to rescue.

But on opening it and pausing to make sure that the long passage was not lined with those hoping to profit by the intrusion, where doubly men were turned aloof as forbidden by gallantry and loyalty, she was almost instantly

petrified, like her companions. She perceived a hazy form gliding along.

“The phantom of the palace!” moaned she, recoiling into the embrasure, prompted to shut the door on herself, either when on the other side, which prudence counseled, or on this, which her brave heart commanded.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE PALLID PASSION OF A SHADOWY KING.

Like the felines, Louis XIII. had a rousing with the sinking of night, contrary to normal human nature; then he disported in his measured, selfish way. This time he dispensed with his ordinary distractions, potent by number and wearying by their silliness separately.

The court minstrels were rehearsing a ballet by the king's own hand, but he tired and left a change to the leader's choice. He substituted an air, as by a forethought, or private instructions, by the queen's violin player, Boccan. It was one of those love songs simple to us, but appearing, like the chants of Rizzio, to have had deep effect on the high born of that age.

Louis found this haunting him and hummed it after the musicians had been dismissed.

Count de Ludes, who had introduced to him Luynes, the only favorite who lasted out his favor until his death, had the audience. He spoke indifferent matters until the king made him more open. Then he revived the affair of Sansforain's death, but this time enlarged not on the family grief so much as on the sufferings still unavenged of his relict. He spoke so hotly of the fiendish desire of Gaston to disfigure so incomparable a beauty as Anne-Charlotte's that the king, as if absently, withheld a minia-

ture of her, taken some three years before, and Ludes did not ask for it.

Among the nostrums and infallible panaceas which spring up like weeds in all countries where medical science is struggling, a good portion is always sent in to the king's doctor. He recommended, after test, a certain drug, probably hasheesh, of which, the fable ran, that one of the Sultans had owed renewed youth to it.

Louis tried it after supper and felt better than for six years past.

When Louis felt "better," it is a word cutting both ways, for Louis lively realized his father's sad prophecy, said to his Mother Marie: "That wicked boy, if I do not live to protect you, will cause you much pain."

It was nigh the anniversary of the slaying of Marshal Ancre, in 1617. He had need, therefore, for an antidote to the depression he underwent about this time. Not for the crime, or for having deeply wounded his mother by this removal of her friend, but because he ever wondered how these adventurers died rich and he, the sovereign, often lacked a thousand gold pieces.

He had relieved himself of all the attendants; he zig-zagged in the room next that in which he had supped, with short, broken steps. A transformation in him would have alarmed his congeners.

Blood, not potable lead, now coursed in his veins; his eyes, hollow as ever, burned up like the gas in the blow-pipe; his brows and his mustache bristled with the electricity in the air. That love tune tingled in his ears.

He was awaiting a sort of key to a mystery of which he held but part of the solution. Some one, who seemed to be more friendly to him than to others who should have looked after him, saving all love for him and none for his brother, his queen, his minister or his nobler yearnings, was in correspondence with him, very secretly, since long.

He liked this perfect secrecy—it so harmonized with his nature.

It amused him to guess who it might be. He finally believed that it was Father Joseph, whom he, by instinct rather than by any detectable betrayal of the Capuchins, divined to be a kind of rival of Richelieu, without seeking to usurp his ministerial portfolio.

Presently, there came scratching on the wall, behind a great picture—Apollo exiled to dwell among the shepherds of Admetus; a freshness in one point struck the king on hearing this authorized means of attracting royal attention; one of the faces, a shepherdess', had been freshly painted over.

“The head of that Baroness of Sansforain,” said Louis, “or is it I can see nothing else since Ludes hammered her name into my poor head, and thrust her likeness into my hand?”

Behind this retouched face, well done, the scratching was again audible.

Louis looked around cautiously. In a palace every room has not only its ear of the tyrant, but the eyes of Argus.

But his curiosity was excited; he was at last to know this hidden counselor to whom he was much indebted, and though he had in loneliness, which he hoped this unknown might be by to break, uttered his appeal to him, never had he shown himself.

The master of the place knew the trick of this picture—a door and one with the panel itself. He touched the spring knob and opened a passage mouth, all in darkness.

But if he had thought that Father Joseph was his correspondent, he was undeceived. This was a dark, tall man. He wore beard like a Spaniard. His maroon velvet doublet, black trunks and flat, velvet cap pulled over the brow, were all of the mode Anne of Austria tried with indifferent success to bring in.

So impressed was he that this was of his queen's country, that he banished a quick idea that the face was not altogether unfamiliar. No doubt it was one of Anne's mysterious envoys, who came from her brother, and this was an attempt to tie his hands on the eve of some war stroke of Spain's in which it was not wanted France should meddle.

In this case, Louis was not in danger; the more hostile his chief minister was to Philip, the more he himself would be cherished. He stepped into the breach and let the door slide back into place. But the gloom was not to last long. The other ignited a sort of chemical match and kindled the wick of a dark lantern. He let the glow filter through the air holes at the lantern top, and by this the king inspected his guide.

As he was not one of those physiognomists who assert their ability to identify a person, once met, by the eyes, alone unalterable, he was baffled by the countenance; it was plastic and pliant, like an actor's; but had the king been informed of the new process by one Dr. Norblin, for a false face, he would have taken this for a specimen of the art. Had the worthy Norblin, otherwise unknown to fame, discovered collodion? Sufficient be it for this story that he covered the skin of his patients with a fresh pellice, adhering by wax; this mask followed all the creases and with the edges at eyes, nose and mouth also smeared with flesh-colored wax, defied scrutiny, at least by night and in this semi-obscurity.

As much as the king evinced disappointment at not setting his first surmise down to certainty, the man seemed gratified at not being discovered.

In such a cover the disfigured man might not know himself before a looking-glass.

It seemed to the observer that in the eyes were sorrow and craving; for the rest, a mask showed the dissembler and the voice, a little feigned and a good deal fawning, was a courtier's, that is, a professional dissimulator's.

Such was the tradition of the palace that, on finding this stranger was on the proper footing, the king renounced any apprehension.

"All is ready!" said this man, in his low, cooing voice. "Does it please your majesty to accept my guidance?"

The monarch had shaken his head to himself in token

that he gave up the attempt to fix his memory, though in his mind. He hastened to nod to him.

The study of his back, since kings are more apt to see the cringing form than the front upright, almost revived his searching, but again the memory was fleeting.

“Oh, I shall know who he is when he claims his reward! These parasites always come for the reward!” said Louis, with cynicism of his state.

Out in the regular ways, the conducted prince wondered a little by what power the usual lingerers, loungers and officials on duty had been removed. This consideration was promising that the affair was excellently managed, and by one brought up in a palace. As on a ship at sea, one has seldom isolation, and least of all, the master.

The absence of guards, lights, noise, would have unsettled another kind of king, but Louis liked quiet, stealthiness and the twilight.

But he was too proud to put a question.

At a turn to mount a staircase, the conductor relieved him so far as to say :

“All precautions are taken.” Then, having passed into the hall through the ladies-in-attendance’s hall, he stopped at the room door where Lady Combalet and Lady Sansforain had been closeted, and said, in a low voice, trained like a fine house servant’s :

“She awaits you here!”

With that, shutting a slide so that the holes in the lamp chimney were stopped, he vanished, as if supernatural.

Louis was left alone, where he had never come but in the state in which a king should visit his queen.

This introduction of him to the forbidden ground—to all but him and secrecy was not enjoined on him—was so admirably done that he had not felt one plank tremble. It was impossible to doubt that the next stage was not as easy, though he was left to guide himself, with what would be delicacy in any other proceeding.

He considered that the serenity he had lately enjoyed was due to the Fleury flash-in-the-pan. All his annoyances were out of sight: Chalais, self-exiled, to carry out the second act in his conspiracy; the Duchess of Chevreuse in the country; Anjou lurking in Lorraine; Richelieu absorbing all the work so that he was free. The queen! ah, where was the queen this night? But he could hope by this sample of how his unknown agent had arranged that he should declare his passion to Anne-Charlotte, that the queen would be hoodwinked, if not stupefied, as it was undoubted were her surrounding attendants, and out of all interference.

As he paused on the threshold, with that prudence which keeps a cat from risking even its paw in a tempting mouse-hole, one of his bright flashes of malice enlightened him.

“If I foil the instruments in their prank against Anne? If I throw aside this folly!” He smiled with intense enjoyment. “If, being here, at the queen’s door, I open that door and not this? if I declare I am no longer proof to her countless charms, her patience, her resignation? and

fall at her feet for her to bid me rise and obtain my forgiveness?"

But, instantly, for fertility of fancy produces so much that one idea is pushed off by a second, he saw another scene.

It was as logically possible.

The queen would esteem it an artifice; despise it as beneath a sovereign, and repulse him with her native, cold pride—*morgue*—before her austere ladies.

"And yet," reasoned the hesitating man, "if she really is fond of this newcomer, she will admire me for having respected her; and who knows but our relations will improve! I must have somebody to love, for the cardinal's oppression makes me hate him, though how can one dispense with a minister so fond of that detestable writing, and writing, and writing? He is absorbing all those around me—it is he detaches me, and when I solicit some companion, probably this Barradas is put forward by the duke! I must have somebody to trust—and who more appropriate than the queen?"

"With her really at my side, we might laugh at these plotting politicians, these citizens who suck our money bags, and these nobles who revolt—yes, the highest revolt, parliament would do so if it dared, and, above all, Gaston is revolting!" He laughed.

He put his hand boldly to the door just to make his temptation be worsted at the most trying moment, and, finding it ready to open, deliberately repulsed his intention.

“Our lady be praised!” he murmured, and turned to depart in the queen’s-suite direction, when something ghastly loomed up in the unlit passage. It was like a bat crossing the telescope end while one regards a placid moonlight.

He could not deceive himself that it was his dark guide returned.

Nothing could be less similar.

Louis was superstitious, but after his kind; he could mock at one saint and appeal to another; found a church and apply to it his winnings at cards; as his health waned, he had become a friend of death, but he was not apt to give way to weakness as to visions of the surrounding world.

Always eating heartily, lately excessively, he had no returning spirits of those whom he had helped to lose, to torment him.

But this figure, here in the same license as he, untroubled, unchallenged, flitting with the freedom of a born tenant, flattered pride of race. It was “the specter of the Louvre” whom the royal masters were in particular bound to see, before great disaster: Francis before the Pavia campaign, Charles IX., to whom it came to kill him with remorse; and his own father as well as the previous Henry, to warn them of the assassin’s knife!

A king may jeer at common folks’ ghosts, but one appointed to commune with the royal personages only!

The form came on, with that noiseless, swimming move-

ment, peculiar to its kind, and which only a woman can imitate, when, like Juno, she seems to walk on clouds.

What, did this offer to him the dregs of the cup of which partook his predecessors? He had thrown away in wars the treasure painfully amassed by his sire; he had wasted his time to no purpose; his reign would go down in history under the name of his great minister! He was satellite who should have been sun! This ghost rebuked him for this nocturnal digression, no wise inferior in villainy to his brother's enterprise against the same innocent victim.

Under that roof his wife's servants should be inviolate!

Relying upon his guards, for Treville was to him what Desessarts was to the queen, he never carried other arm than a dagger to scratch out a blot on paper or cleave the ribbon sealed to a letter.

What had availed his father, in his carriage, when the knife reached for his heart? Fate impelled it.

Besides, steel does not exercise such an unearthly apparition as this creeping up, without pause or trepidation!

If he could only hear its step, its breathing, or seen life in the cast-down eyes, and felt that there was something human even in its impulsion towards him!

But no! He believed that his fearless father would have flinched here—he forgot the prayer of his youth and not daring to turn his head, beat with his heel at the

door, to which he backed, not recalling that it was unfastened when he tried it.

“The palace phantom!” stammered he, stammering more than his habit, coming to the same determination as Lady Sansforain.

The phantom came on, its lips moving as if in some curse or prayer.

“White lady! white fool!” murmured he, “it is not you who needs praying—it is I——”

But as it almost could reach his shoulder he smothered a shriek and burst in at the door.

It seemed to him that the apparition had been weeping, and that its robe glistened with tears.

He faced around, setting his back to the door, hoping that the terror would pass on. He wanted to hear no message from his ancestors’ tomb—he could go out to the abbey, and hear that there! But at the same moment his hearing was superseded by his sight awakened. He found that he was not alone. The object of his vagary was before him in the small compass of that room.

Anne-Charlotte confronted him; and though she was pale and in consternation, he acknowledged with burning humiliation that she was less daunted than he.

Seeing him, too, at this hour where he had no right to be, autocrat anywhere else, her indignation was kindled and her color returned.

Ah, what if this were some trick—if she had an assistant who would literally frighten him into this trap?

His mood changed like light into day. He opened his

arms, and though the ghost had entered to stay him, he was bent on seizing this prize.

Though one was fair and the other dark, some of the resemblance between the brothers was manifest to the lady of honor. She recalled only too vividly the embrace of Gaston in which she had struggled, and she was about to repel this attack, although the surprise was next to as keen, with a rude blow, spite of her special education.

Scorn, disgust, and abhorrence at so foul a scheme, and this desecration of the wifely residence, converted her into a virago.

She felt that in defending her honor she was punishing a hypocrite, who came without the least inclination of herself, to reveal his vileness.

But even as her hand could have descended on his cheek, she let it fall as if paralyzed. This exposure, for the fracas must rouse even the narcotized ladies, would be a scandal of which she would die and her patroness suffer.

Anne had been kind to her; she had brought her out of obscurity, and given her a place in the enviable court. She had transferred to her the Duchess of Chevreuse's position of friendship, and a Queen of France's friendship was priceless.

So she receded as if frightened at her audacity, and reaching the window, where the two flaps were still open, she leaped or, rather, fell out.

“By the head of St. Denis!” the king exclaimed,

but stifled the cry, "it is not merely a saint—she is a martyr!"

Shrinking from looking out lest he saw a dead thing at the foot of the wall on the rose beds, he muttered:

"That was a real apparition, and it boded death to that girl if not to others! and it is a bad night for me!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

EXPIATION BY DEPUTY.

It is not maligning Anne-Charlotte to reveal that the window, out of which she leaped, played pretty easily on its hinges by reason of her frequently being at it to look out. And as D'Artagnan found that she was often at that place, he did not let his grade, giving him liberty, prevent his walking about the garden more often than strict duty led him.

On this evening, he should have been one of the first post but, to the general amaze, the sentries were called off to fall in with those who should have replaced them, and all were marched back to be dismissed together.

“Retiring the outposts?” mused our tyro, deliberating while his comrades were delighted at the unlooked-for vacation. “This is a new experience!”

The other young gentlemen sat down to carouse or at pastimes, for it was a happy-go-lucky, inconsiderate race.

“In this way the guards would be withdrawn,” he pondered, “if Lord Richelieu wished to renew his addresses to her majesty; or the King of Spain wished to speak privately with his sister; or that jack-in-the-box, Anjou, wished to insinuate that runagate, Chalais, into the place by way of the queen as a fellow conspirator. Who would do it but by the king’s orders, but what on earth and the waters around it, does the king here with our corps?”

Desessarts and Guitaut do not look for orders in that quarter!"

The young man did not ruffle the air by complaining or even questioning; he was one who inquired silently by his eyes and ears. All his reasonings came to one issue and that was blocked solidly; who would want to roam in this region unchallenged—unseen, unsuspected, even if possible, but the master? All the popular reports pointed at the king's disposition of mind for seeking solace in the flight of Chalais; evidently the troubles of that poor Baroness of Sansforain were to be recommenced.

"Death to my hopes!" thought the Gascon, "since there is nobody left to watch over our forsaken queen but Louis D'Artagnan. Why, this Louis will mount guard all by himself!"

Since the others were dicing, there was no opposition to his returning to the scene.

All were forbidden the place, so he was sure that he would not meet many promenaders.

The night was serene, but a little oppressive with sultriness; along the ground haze hovered, and the leaves glistened faintly with dew. The building front looked dismal; at such lonesome times the tragedies were remembered, not the rejoicings, the festivals and the galas.

The solitary saunterer felt the gloom pile upon his shoulders; the gardens seemed too completely deserted. He longed for the sentinels' challenge and their "All's well!"

The flowery emanations seemed less pleasing and were

sleep-giving; even the reptiles, which haunted the spots where birds ate the seeds by day, moved with oily undulations and irritatingly faint cracklings of their scales.

It was only too easy to imagine all distortions of the shadows in the copses, and the cut trees assumed even more fantastical shapes than designed. The water dripping into the basins sounded disagreeably, and the fountain jets sluggishly fell back, like blood in a surgeon's basin.

The young man, not fond of loneliness, felt inclined to draw his sword and cut off the peony heads or fly at those evanescent figures and bid them "Stand and discover yourselves!"

Amid the masses of ivy and bine, the shrouded statues loomed like nymphs entangled in the vines or, if prone, the half-hidden victims of murderers, hastily escaped.

Not a light up at the windows, where customary.

Somehow he thought of this palace where security was not.

Its lord abandoned it as if unsafe; at this door, to his knowledge, a daring hand had strewn the horse-irons; why not the same infernal malignant enter here and sprinkle some other engine of regicide for the queen's injury?

Still that unwonted silence up at the windows; he never expected the queen's foreign attendants to play the ogling donnas on the balcony, but the native charmers often brightened up the openings; as for the latest, he delighted

to see Lady Sansforain enframed in the curtains and peeping out—was it for her deliverer?

But what use is a deliverer where all is ease and comfort? This void, if not accidental and natural, was to the profit of whom?

Yet who should have his way facilitated? The king need not traverse the grounds when he might, with his escort, cross through the palace.

What if the king, fond of quiet and solitude, should prefer the hushed gardens for a visit to his queen?

In that case he, here, without orders and in the teeth of them, might cross his path.

Now what does a man do, a soldier, a courtier, when he crosses his king's path?

“What do you do?” he questioned, drolly, a melancholy Pan with one horn fractured, for a merry maid having hung her pall-mall bat upon it. “Use your tact, for if he does not wish to be seen, you should turn away and make off quicker and quicker! If you guess his errand and it is not commendable, you increase your pace.”

Now pondering over the royal characteristics, D'Artagnan found himself humming an old ballad about the death of Marshal Luynes; this murderer-in-ordinary to the young King Louis died at a siege of fever ingloriously.

“Montlaur in ashes lies, and all Garonne is free!

Yet rise no joyous cries, though Luynes is dead, we see!”

“Bah!” muttered the self-chosen scout, halting, “it must be the local spirit, the *genus loci*, as Aramis says, for here

I stand where Luynes and his pack of ruffians, lineal ancestors of Gaston's bullies, massacred that infamous Marshal Ancre!"

Indeed, he was by the spot, called Lover's Bridge, although the bridge, in question, a flying one, had been taken away. Fable said that it led from the queen's apartments so that Ancre-Concini, her minister, could confer on their plots upon the king's peace or purse—since the Italian died enormously rich. It was by Dormant Bridge that the actual crime was committed, though blood was spilled here in connection. Luynes claimed that he did it because the young king "willed" that he should avenge his father, so they hewed the favorite like Agg.

The dense shrubbery was opaque to blackness in its thickness. The gravel paths showed up bluish with the refuse from the brick kilns. To the searcher's surprise, not to his intimidation, he spied a figure, muffled up to no definite form, on the walk, and outlined by the boxwood copse. If it had not been leisurely moving, he might have doubted it had life. Its gown was without hood, but that interesting apparition was a vulgar one, haunting the old city.

He had left off his spurs. He could advance quietly, not continuing his ballad. It was either a short man or a tallish woman; in the only opening in the gown, the eyes were bared, but they did not have the phosphoric glow attributed to specters.

The ghost, partial to the Louvre, according to barrack-room tales, was not bulky, darksome and bashful like this,

but loved to parade with an audience to admire it or be awed.

But after a fourth stride, this figure seemed about to collapse and, indeed, sank to the ground. It should have sunk altogether, but it stopped halfway in this orthodox ghostly proceeding.

He rushed forward, lest it vanished under his eagerly dashed-forth hand.

“Stop!” cried he.

But the form had only bent; it was in the attitude of prayer; probably the hands were clasped and both knees on the ground.

It looked at the first as if he had caught a depredator who sued for mercy; but a courtly perfume permeated the coarse mantle and he was ready to swear that those unseen hands were stylish, as the prayer would be in a dulcet voice.

“Who is this? What do you here—here?” asked he, much as a priest would address an intruder found in the close hours in a church. “Do you take the Italian garden for a burying place of the Carthusians?”

Whether the stranger was reassured by the slightly jesting accent or by the accent itself, or admitted that his military aspect entitled him to be authoritative, she rose. It was no ghost, but a woman, and by her carriage, lady-like enough, to be strayed out of the queen’s rooms.

But the Gascon did not know her yet as attached to the palace.

“Sir, I am widow of Lord Albert Luynes, and I am praying here with a supplication for his soul!”

“The mercy you are!”

The intermarriages so complicated family names that it took a geneologist to keep the accounts, but still this was a celebrity. The widow of the constable of France, then, was Lady Chevreuse.

Marie Rohan Montbazon; who wedded the first favorite, waited but the year of mourning to marry again. This time, it was a magnificent noble who startled by such extravagant feats as having twenty carriages built so that he might choose the easiest one! Claude Lorraine, Duke of Chevreuse, afterwards Prince of Joinville, was twice her age, not an Adonis, but a man of sense, wit and coolness in danger.

But she had the mania for intrigue and became the intimate friend of the new queen, apparently just to break up the royal household while cementing the interests of her families.

The facts revived to D'Artagnan; he still thought it strange that this woman who married swiftly and had no reputation as a mourner, should be weeping over her first husband's memory or his victim's death-place.

He felt disposed to explain why he interrupted the solemn interlude, it not occurring to him that the guards had been retired on purpose to let the forbidden lady revisit this saddening scene.

He had the hardness to remind her, with stern military directness, that her name was no longer on the list at the

gateways of persons allowed entrance into the precincts. In fact, she was expressly excluded.

“Your grace will pardon a young officer, whose sole way to raising is by faithfulness to his orders,” apologized he, “but as the night air is malarious and such appeasing of the manes is not according to rules, I must see you to the gate. Any preference for one or another?”

She darted at him one of those looks which had disquieted much less inflammable hearts than the adventurer’s, but, somehow, perhaps because according to mathematics one body cannot occupy the place of another, his heart did not budge. He offered his arm, crooked and stiff as a wooden one. Stiffly, as a veteran, he marched her off.

At the gate not the slightest attention was paid to her; who cares to look twice at a soldier ushering his laundry woman under a cloak, hiding her basket of linen and her nose? One does not enter without being challenged—unless she were the exception—but it is different in going out.

The all-conquering duchess, piqued by this stolidity, had not murmured on the compulsory promenade, and acted as if she had fulfilled all her mission in life by her pious deed. She did not even say good-night to her volunteer escort. Her “Thanks, young sir!” was also spoken as to an automaton.

The guardsman ought to have been obliged to her, for it was no recommendation for him to have been civil to the banished queen’s confidante whom Louis hated, and a lit-

tle too often recalled as the remnant of that "King" Luynes.

"It is lucky," he condoled himself, "that I am not the man to turn back on my road, for I have already set up several stumbling blocks. Who but I, with my reprehensible blundering, would have made a foe of the next to the crown? Chalais I have offended, though he is no obstacle just now; and here I set all the swarm of hornets against me by expelling the Chevreuse duchess from the gardens of her Armida.

"And may I have not spoiled a *medianoche* (midnight supper) in the queen's native mode? Why frustrate her friend's entrance here? Perhaps all this was to facilitate their meeting! Bah! my sire always inculcated that I should act for the king, and to bring Chevreuse and Austria into touch is very like showing the serpent the tree to which Eve is daily coming to see how the fruit is "ripening."

After this episode, the gardens became more melancholy.

The silence was so perfect as to fill his ears with tingling as if voices were muttering all but comprehensible. The odor of the plants suggested the flower pots with which the Gastonets had been bombarded, for somehow he began to think of them.

What if the duchess dared the prohibition to scout for an inroad?

"It is the favoring circumstances for them! They were afraid that the Queen's Guards would make a bold front

that they had us dismissed into the dark. My self-imposed patrol is already productive! I will maintain it. Who knows but a sanctimonious *devotée* will slip in to tell his beads over a place of murder? Only, may his rosary be a bandolier and the beads bullets!"

He itched to do something under his lady-love's windows again. But had she seen his gallanting the cloaked duchess out of the palace bounds?

He looked up. Suddenly, like a foreboding, his heart dilated. He spied a slightly moving profile on the garden wall. It was too large for a cat, and yet only a cat would be presumed to risk where the top ought to be strewn with those natural caltrops called shards and bottle ends.

It was human, though bent double.

It was also feminine, but the discoverer had no idea that it was the irrepressible duchess returned for ingress at another point!

"This visitress is not posted up at the gates! Unless she were a heroine, she would not clamber over the stones of the old wall that defended the Burgundians and English! What the deuce is it—a servant practicing to come out as a rope dancer when she leaves domestic service?"

He could not understand how a climber in petticoats, many and thick as in days when distrustful persons carried their wardrobe on them, reached that height.

He could not see through four foot of rubble wall. But if he had that power he would have seen that the other approach was not sheer as on this side.

The old tile grounds had been delved for clay and the

rejected stuff had been heaped up at a distance from the furnaces. This distance was bounded by the Louvre wall, and as the mass had been undermined by the wall drip, in time all had become a leaning tower, finally resting against the stone. Thus to one who went around and essayed to mount to the coping, it was easy as going up the recognized Alpine ascents adjoining the hotels.

Inside the grounds, nothing of this was visible and it had aroused no apprehensions. But the habitual pail of mortar and the broken pots and bottles of which he had thought, had been omitted in this spot where the creature imitated Mahomet's coffin in being neither in the sky nor on the earth.

"I spy!" cried he, not too loudly, as he feared that too sudden an alarm might precipitate her into his arms.

Moreover, he had believed that Tacit was an ally to Somnus, who presided over the doings.

At his alarm, a laugh responded; husky, not very womanly, amused. The discovered one had found something funny in the discovery or what was more irritating to the discoverer, in him.

As this cool reception of his kindly challenge denoted a person not likely to fall off with surprise or terror, it was useless to draw his sword and hold it up for her to impale herself.

So, plucking his side knife out of its case, and clicking it with his thumb nail so that the sound was not unlike a pistol going on cock, he levelled its blade at the figure.

"*Hola! vaya!*" said he, using his native tongue in the

crisis and in his anger at being slighted, "come down, you! or I shall bring you down!"

"Better bring me a pillow of down! my little compatriot!"

"Phew! it is Spanish!" muttered the guardsman, lowering his sham pistol. "I betrayed myself with the exotic expletives! The interjection is an awful traitor, it lets one out who speaks a language otherwise perfectly."

The Gascon and the Spanish are like neighbors when anyone tries to part them when quarreling. He could do no less than reply in the stranger's tongue, especially as this kept this unusual dialogue secret to any eavesdroppers.

"I do not admit that I am a compatriot, but I do repeat that I must bring you down in my arms if not with firearms, seeing that you are a dame!"

"You had better bring me the gardener's ladder, for I am laden and must tip the balance at two hundred pounds!" was the alarming rejoinder. "There ought to be one over there, under the ope tree. The gardener has a spite against us ladies, I do a-vouch, for he leaves it in a fresh place each day to break every bone in the body of us poor ladies!"

"The gardener's ladder?—she is a frequenter here; one of the establishment, then!" thought D'Artagnan. "What a pity the queen's home and homely brigade are so much out of the same cask."

"No less! and a little one as well as the long one! The latter for a choice because of my load!"

“Load! What is she loading up with on top of a wall?”

“And mind how you stand under, for I warn you, my pert Gascon, that I am the stout body of the queen’s cortège, and it is a strong mule that gets me over the ground!”

Although the voice continued harsh, it had a merry ring, and D’Artagnan did not have to test his memory to place this voice under its owner’s name, at last.

“Donna Estefania!” cried he; and wondering that this jolly woman by being exalted had become amiable, out of being to him the churliest and most forbidding of all the queen’s Spanish defenders.

He was touching firm ground at last after wading.

To abridge the distance between them, after she so gayly broke the ice, he hastened to grope about and spurn the grass till he found the ladder by nearly stumbling over it.

So confident was he that the dame of weight, without her load, still a mystery, would not vanish, that he did not once look back. Finding the ladder, he raised it with difficulty, since he had struck the bigger, and he carried it to the spot. Its strength was yet to be tested, but it was long enough.

It jutted above the cornice, in fact, inducing the woman still jokingly to remark:

“Faith of my patron! you could, with this, regulate the hands of the clock in the tower.”

D’Artagnan was naturally delicate, but he also remembered that a Queen of Spain—and logically her attendants

in some degree—is without lower limbs, so, planting himself with his back to the ladder he called out:

“Fly down, please!”

On this, whether the woman tried the means of communication in doubt about her wings or arms being fit, a mass slid down the wooden rectangle and rolled over the cross-bars and fetched up against the guardsman with a bump, which deprived him of sensation, though it was soft.

At his feet stopped the mass. It was a large sack filled to bursting and, indeed, slightly exuding by its imperfectly tied mouth sundry grasses, herbs and plants. This nocturnal strayer on the walls was then a botanical collector.

But while he was staring, and modestly but cleverly taking advantage of his confusion, another round body descended likewise and adroitly landed on the other side of him, resting momentarily in a balloon of black taffety and petticoats, and rising to discover her face in a hooded cape.

The skin was swarthy as a gypsy's; the eyes were light and he had taken all Spanish eyes to be black; but the mouth, though plump and moist, extended widely so as to have admitted a saucer; the cheeks were creased as with black lines; altogether not inviting, as seen by night; what a fright by day. But she seemed to make up for being a horror by mirthful expression and, thank heaven, many a grim mouth can grin to make you laugh, and the hollowed eyes are cups of drollery.

“You are a true *caballero*” (gentleman) cried her husky, yet kindly, voice.

“Why, you Spanish are superb!” said he; “if I were not a Gascon I would like to be one.”

Nothing more than this compliment was needed to conquer the affections of this dame, whom he had considered the most austere and ascetic of Anne’s *tiring* women, in both senses of the word.

“Jove! after all, ‘beldame’ was derived from *belle-dame* or I am a sinner!” He saluted and, in a merry vein, as there was surely nothing political or treacherous in this episode, pursued:

“At your feet, donna, the service of your true squire, Don Luis of Artagana!” he “Spanished” his name for the tone, “but what in the name of all that is frisky, are you, Donna Estefania, doing a-top of the garden wall?”

“Getting over it—you do not suppose that on that masonry grows and thrives the material for the favorite salads for our mistress, do you?”

“Oh, you have salad herbs there?” and he indicated the bag.

“And in quantity, too! Ah, it is a good air for pot herbs, this of Paris!”

The young man made a contemptuous hiss.

“What. you sneer at salad and you, a Spaniard?”

“You know that I have the honor to be a Gascon; and the oak tree of Gascony was old when the Spanish chestnut was still in the shell!” and he twirled his mustache, loftily.

The lady did not flare up at the slur.

“Good! You ought to know that in the first place, for salad, we must have oil!”

“Like that which lubricates your tongue! Go on!”

“And pepper, red and black, which are medicines.”

“I do not object to pepper.”

“To follow which should be vinegar, the counteragent, and such sprouts of the vegetable kingdom as mint, sour-grass, hips and haws, borage, spring onions, and, speaking of the wall, the buds of wallflowers with their redolent, delicious smack!”

“Oh, they perfume the queen’s salad with wallflower buds, now?” stammered the pupil, his head wavering with the enumeration.

“It is undeniable. It is written so in ‘The Indispensable Cook’s Oracle’ by the bishop of Obispo’s chef.”

“In fact, you have been simply gathering herbs for the queen’s salad—at this hour?”

“At this—it is the dew hour, saving your reverence!”

“So, the queen sups at midnight?”

“It is our custom and approved by your physicians, for a light repast with pleasant chat at midnight fortifies the system against melancholy when one is alone!”

“I am ready with my faith, like a new convert, but it is hard to allow the idea that all those herbs came off that wall!”

“Oh, no,” said Donna Estefania, laughing; “I was over in the field there, which is to be a garden some day;

meanwhile, the wild things occupy it, and there is good store of what I sought!"

"But the ladder not being raised and there being, I judge, none on the farther side, how without wings, which I do not see, did you cross the barrier?"

"Oh, I walked out as plain as the day, with my bag under my mantle. I filled it in the field and sat on the wall, awaiting the soldier 'on sentry-go' to come along and do for me the kindness with the ladder I owe to your lordship!"

"There," said the guardsman; "I have it! The captain was wondering what progress the soldiers are making in speaking Spanish! It is taught them over a mouthful of salad by the queen's, so obliging, ladies-in-waiting!"

"You are on the right ground," said the mirthful duenna, impatiently.

"But yet I do not understand how with that load you reached the top there!"

"No believing without seeing. Just run up the rounds and see why I and my bag required no ladder!"

"Wait!" and he paused with one foot on the bottom rung. "I suppose the queen is without company, as usual, that she has so meager a spread as salad?"

Estefania looked at him and closed one eye.

"One must not be taken unawares, you know. We Spanish are hospitable! There is always a boiled egg, a roast fowl and a cut of sausage in the larder, though—I fear not to say it, since you are not French!—your master is a curmudgeon! I do not care who he has had put

in prison or whom he sends to the block, but, by all the martyrs, he will not be forgiven who treats a really beautiful lady like Queen Anne with shyness and negligence bordering on insult!"

"Amen!" said the gallant.

Then to set his doubt at rest, he mounted the ladder.

"I suppose I must carry my gallantry so far as to carry that huge parcel of hers into the apartments," grumbled he.

He reached the cornice without halt and in a glance saw that the pile of refuse earth made the ascent of infinite ease.

"Why, the proverbial mule loaded with silver which can enter any fortress would not balk at that!" said he. "What dolts! Well, this is a castle as poorly walled in as guarded! You were right," added he, turning his head, "a snowball could be rolled up here by a boy—Hallos!"

Estefania and her precious herbs had disappeared.

"Hang the jade! I don't believe her tale now—unless it is a little expanded! She was not gathering edible herbs, that old hag! She is a Medea, as they say, who plucks deadly weeds to send people to sleep or even into the unwaking slumber!"

He mounted the wall itself to see if she were threading the paths, but she was gone in the vistas.

To add to his provoked temper, he had sprung up too incautiously from the ladder. Spurned, it had, like a living thing discarded, moved a little at the first, then more,

and soon, till as he looked for it, it leaped along the wall sidewise and reached the ground.

“If I ever heard a chuckle, I should believe that witch shoved that ladder aside! What a night for losing a footing!”

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN WHICH THE PALACE PHANTOMS FAVOR OUR HERO
WITH A PEEP.

“If I were answerable for the queen’s safety,” mused D’Artagnan, reflecting, “I should not allow this approach to be my reproach—for a regiment could march up that hill ten abreast! I must let the captain know about this oversight and stop herb gathering.”

He was about to descend, leisurely, since he had no hope of finding the playful Spanish woman within hail, when the smoothness of the road wall tempted him to make his engineering report complete.

“If I had not learned the footing of a goat in our mountains, I could not walk the narrow edge of nothing—so that this wide way is as the king’s main road! But where did she pick up wallflowers here? The coping stones are admirably joined and a wild onion could not shoot out in such imperceptible cracks!”

He took a few steps and found it easy—with his head one which nothing like a gulf each side dazed.

“One could reach the palace window and peer in—I could see what goes to the mixing of the queen’s salad! I believe that she will have a guest with whom she will discuss other things than sorrel, radishes and eglantine buds!”

The wall ended at a leaded roof; to one side was the

watch-tower in the belfry of which was that not-over-worked bell, rung only on the birth of a king or his death, or a royal birthday.

On the other hand was the broad gutter along the dormitories.

“Nothing like the actual deed,” said he; “I can report that a man in boots could enter the queen’s apartments with ease as on the parapet of the new bridge!”

In truth, it was even less hazardous than the bridge, when Anjou and his tribe pushed the citizens to the wall and almost over into the river in their “rushes” like mad bulls.

“Ah! what a place to meet the duke coming out of the palace on this wall! It would be single combat, then, out of which there would pass but one! No retreating, no sidling—face to face—ah!” with relish, “that I saw him now!”

But his way was unimpeded.

“Blessings on him who withdrew the sentries,” went on he, always chatting to himself, but not audibly just now, “for on this height, profiled against the sky, I would offer a mark which would be riddled!”

Arrived at the wall end, he stepped on “the leads,” as the metal roofing by the jutting gutter was called. The sheets being smooth, and the joints soldered, his step was more uncertain than on the stone. He stood by a window. A kind of panic seized him or rather a return of the misgiving which the abnormal state of things occasioned.

He did not want to be seen. Something moved in the

garden; it might be Donna Estefania, but this time he wished to play the trick upon her of disappearing.

The window offered no opposition to a man with a knife to shoot back the spring. He stepped inside and was in the mezzanine corridor.

A half-winding stair led up to the queen's ladies' rooms.

All at once he was sure that the place beneath him was not untenanted.

"It's that herb gatherer!" muttered he, "to jump out and cry: 'War to the Spanish!' would be amusing to me, but, on second thoughts, it would be death to her, that is, to me, also, since I have no business to shout in the queen's lodgings!"

So he drew back into the recess at the corner, and draped the window curtains about him.

But these were not the footsteps of the pousy, tiring woman. If so, she must have dropped her burden and changed into felt slippers. The almost inaudible steps were grisly. Then he beheld in the very dim light out of the starlit sky, a shape transmitting cold horror: A female face, glowing with a dull flame apparently growing and evaporating, exactly like the ever-burning bodies of the condemned dead in the pit. Over the robe glistened like dew, which did not quench the torment, innumerable tears; the sinner condemned to walk at midnight had uselessly poured these tokens of repentance and suffering. On the shoulders, where military officers wore epaulets, two blanched death heads were set.

In short, it was the identical figure which Louis the king had received as the white lady of the Louvre, and Anne-Charlotte, spite of her stout heart had also yielded into taking for supernatural.

“The specter of the palace!” muttered D’Artagnan, shrinking up as one does to let the dead be borne by in a narrow passage.

He caught a glimpse of the face; it was beautiful though sad, queenlike, worthy to haunt a palace; but above all there was nothing of the like in his knowledge of that fleeting complexion of a white flame—shimmering like the fumes off melted mercury.

He forgot he had a sword by his side—that he had hands—all he had of existence was his sight to watch this apparition float by and ascend the stairs. Instead of sulphur, he could have sworn that the perfume accompanying this vision was one recently inhaled. He was too flustered to remember that the like had been with Lady Chevreuse and not among Estefania’s bag of herbs.

The figure had gone up to the next floor, when he was roused from his inertness by a noise—it was the door slammed by the king to cut off the phantom’s pursuit.

This was significant, and the guardsman was about to dart up in chase, but, instantly, outside the window by which he had entered, he saw white gleaming.

He turned that way and, leaning out, saw within a few feet a woman hanging by the window jamb, oscillating, her hands insecure, about to fall.

But at his step thither something rolled under his foot

and burst with a slight explosion. He looked down as if the floor were undermined. Another and another of these objects startled him, shining.

He stooped and picked one up: it was a "tear," that is, a bead, of glass, and called "Prince Rupert's drops," at a later period.

"A tear? Oh, oh!" for he recalled that the robes of the passerby was studded with such ornaments. "A glass tear? Oh, this vision was substantial, if no more than glass!"

But a convulsive sob without, redirected his attention on the woman hanging out of the casement. At this second look, he had no doubt.

"The lady of Sansforain!" murmured he.

He clapped his hand to his side with pain and apprehension.

"Is it she played the ghost? She is like to do it in earnest if she falls! Hold there!"

To hesitate was to let her be destroyed.

Already her grasp had relaxed. Her nails broke and her fingers yielded. He scrambled through his window, but his impetus was too strong—he slipped on the lead and only stayed himself in the deep gutter. He fell, but as it was in the hollow, he caught hold at a venture of one of the cross-bars. They prevented the iron trough bulging when too full.

This engaged his right hand, and while thus overhanging the edge, he grasped with the other at the woman flying in a whirl by him.

He could not stop her, but this interception broke the otherwise fatal fall. In a moment he had imitated her, but fell more carefully.

He lifted her up in his arms.

“The horror of it!” gasped she.

“Yes—you saw the ghost?”

“I saw him.”

“Him? Why, I wager it was a woman—you know—Donna Estef——” Then, a fresh and more compatible idea seizing him at memory of the Duchess of Chevreuse’s talent for tricks, he added: “It was Lady Chevreuse going to see the queen. Don’t be frightened.”

“Frightened?” repeated she, with great scorn. “It was the king.”

She wrenched her hands away from him and buried her face in them. Her cheeks were so hot that they scorched the palms, as if she had glided down a cord holding it with all her force.

“The king?” Oh, had the king played the part of the palace specter for—what end?”

She could not reply, for she had swooned on a garden bench.

He appreciated all the perils of his predicament. It was the king’s palace—one does not fight with his master for a boon. He lifted up her body as if it were a child’s.

“No alarm,” thought he, with all his wariness; “no noise. To such lowness and vileness, keen wit.”

He bore her away to that petty guardhouse in the wall

where had been likewise transported the remains of Marshal Ancre, first object of Louis XIII.'s vindictive temper.

"This silence will be broken awfully," thought the young soldier, when, as though he invoked the spirit deemed to be in a blessed bell, the bell of the Louvre knelled.

The three or four soldiers in the watch house, enjoined to keep within doors, rushed out on seeing with him his charge.

"It is one of the queen's ladies of honor," said he. "Lady Sansforain. She was out picking herbs with Donna Estefania when she fell over a ladder in the grass, and I found her swooned."

"Yes, we saw the Spanish ogress," returned one of the guards. "With her big sack, like a fury bearing a collection of souls into purgatory."

"She is deeply set in the faint," said the other. "Is it a viper bit her?"

"I think," replied the subaltern, "that there was a snake in the grass that frightened her. But, hark! what rang that bell? Out and stand guard! I annul, as your officer, the order to keep out."

CHAPTER XXV.

AND THE KING IS ACCLAIMED AS A LOVING SPOUSE.

With the retreat of King Louis out of the route of the white lady, the latter would have blundered badly if she did not reach the queen's private rooms by a well-known passage.

The queen risked all by letting her in by a secret panel, in full trust to her chosen companions.

She welcomed her old friend, the duchess, as soon as the latter had thrown off the terrifying disguise and removed her skin mask.

They were interrupted in the conversation, though of vital importance, by the noise of Lady Sansforain's fall. Taking this to be nothing to concern her, Lady Chevreuse rapidly related how she had been put back by D'Artagnan in her first essay to reach her goal. Then her disguise covered with the mantle and compelled to skirt the outside of the walls, she had regained the easy approach from the near gardens. But here again the guardsman had waylaid her. But for her uncommon skill in personating Donna Estefania, but giving her a kindlier disposition, she eluded that incorruptible watchdog.

On entering the grounds and leaving him upon the wall, harmless, she hoped, she affixed the mask, dressed herself as the ghost and invaded the palace.

Luckily, between the planner of the king's excursion,

who had had the guards removed, and the queen, having had her suspicious ladies drugged at supper, the rest was easy.

But the booming of the bell, rousing up all in and out of the secret of something being afoot, dispelled the hope of having their conversation out.

Lady Chevreuse had barely time to tell that the great conspiracy was in course. Chalais only waited for a token that he could enter into the last bond making with the Austrian envoy, that token to be from the queen. She engaged Spain thereby.

Anne quickly thrust upon her confidante a small, oblong packet.

"It is my answer," said she; "it is a pack of *tarots*" (fortune-telling cards). Laisques could read by the peculiar arrangement and certain ticks in the ornaments. It was a book among the chiefs.

Lady Chevreuse could not even see the cards, for at this juncture Bertin, a valet trusted, hurried in with a blanched face.

"The king!" he pantomimed better than his suppressed and terrified voice.

The valet led the prohibited lady out, and she was soon on the way from Paris.

It was the time when Louis, recovering from the shock of the young lady throwing herself out of his embrace, and that of the phantom betokening evil to his race, hesitated between natural desire to help the fallen and a more selfish one not to publish his intrusion.

Concluding to descend to the garden, he opened the door just as Lady Chevreuse and the valet crossed the hall to issue by a hidden way.

Too alarmed to see distinctly, he was seized again with the panic. He thought that the phantom was retracing his steps to make sure of its prey, and, uttering a howl as the bell again tolled, he sank in one of his epileptic fits on the floor.

The palace was in an uproar. Lights flashed on all sides as simultaneously as if they had been ignited by the one source.

On hearing the king's howl, like a wolf's despairing in a trap, Anne, herself shaking with trepidation, had a splendid hint from her good angel. She rushed out of her rooms and to the one indicated by a crowd at the door.

Lady Chevreuse had been seen in her swift escape. And the cry that the white lady was roaming was circulating widely.

Anne dashed into the room where none now thought of following her.

She guessed that the king had lost his senses by the apparition. She felt, with him, that no king could survive the ridicule of being terrified by a deception like that.

She shut the door firmly. She went to the window and looked out. The garden was like at a gala—torches crossed and recrossed, and illuminated the whole. Some firearms were pointed at her, and shouts ascended. They took her for the white queen. It was no longer a jest.



“The palace was in an uproar. Lights flashed on all sides as simultaneously as if they had been ignited by the one source.”

(See page 302)

But, at a little distance, a soldier at a guardhouse door suddenly cried out:

“Are you blind? Down with your muskets! It is the queen! Long live the queen!”

“I thank M. D’Artagnan,” said she, leaning out before the guns were fully lowered. “But I pray ye, add: ‘Long live the king!’ who is with me. He, too, thanks you for your vigilance and readiness. All is well with us. But that dreadful bell.”

The bell was silenced. Under D’Artagnan’s direction the shots were fired in the air as a salvo of joy, and the king revived, to find himself with Anne beside him and the outer air full of gunpowder and cheers.

The next day all Paris related that the white queen had promenaded the palace and scared the soldiers and domestics. They quoted Nostradamus’ prognostications, so finely drawn up that, like all good oracles, you can deduce any conclusion from them.

They considered that the king and queen were reconciled, and that they would have a long reign in harmony.

But, whatever Paris believed, and the king, the cardinal was incredulous. He set his secret agents on the hunt. They found that it could not have been Donna Estefania who gathered herbs for salad, since she had passed the night with some fellow countrywomen in the Salutation Convent at Poissy, and that, after the turmoil, a little troop of well-mounted strangers had ridden off from the Tuileries with a woman among them.

Lady Combalet assured her uncle that she and others,

who would have baffled the odd reunion of king and queen, must have been drugged to be rendered inoffensive.

Meanwhile, the burghers were prattling.

“Phantomime, no phantom queens!” they said, over the supper; “it is just a neat little Spanish device to have her man sit up with her at a late snack! Devilish fine pretext to pretend there is a ghost at hand to keep your mate by you. Bless your innocence! My Joan played much the same trick on me when I was about the king’s age, and did not know that a good wife is too good for any man. Oh! these women creatures! Even a crown on the forehead does not repress their funny and clever ideas.”

So, for a week, the city rang with the minstrels singing at all hours: “The Jolly Device of a Queen to Enjoy Her Sire’s Company All to Her Own Accord!” and it seemed as if Louis would pass down to posterity as a merry monarch, like his own father before him.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SOME MAKE ARRESTS, OTHERS HAVE ARRESTS THRUST
UPON THEM.

This reunion of the king and his consort was to the latter the most felicitous of events, if she knew how to gain by it.

And so perverse is fate, only within that hour she had placed in other hands a weapon to throw down the new structure.

She had given to the Duchess of Chevreuse the proof that she added her fortunes to Anjou's in the remaking of the Fleury forays.

Her first thought was to recall it. Unfortunately, she was without assistants. Laporte and Guitaut were unable to aid her.

She was weeping with rage at her helplessness, when Lady Sansforain came to console her, though in want of consolation herself.

The moment D'Artagnan learned that the White Lady must have been personated by Lady Chevreuse, he divined for what she had penetrated the Louvre.

He reasoned thus, and unfolded his theory to the baroness.

The duchess relied on her fascinations to engage and retain adherents. So she had infatuated Chalais and it

was to gratify her rather than Anjou that he again tempted the regicidal course.

The duchess, practically banished into Lorraine, could hardly seek the count; and, like all those who might expect the bearer of the royal order for arrest, he would, no doubt, station himself on the frontier so as to flee.

If Chalais were to be the intermediary with Austria in the negotiations, it would be to him for transmissal that the queen's token of alliance would be sent.

Therefore, attach himself to Chalais, and he must learn where the precious deposit would be made.

If the paper was dispatched direct to the Marquis of Laisques again, Chalais must know of it, since he and the marquis would have to debate upon it in their hands.

"Your cousin, Chalais, is the key," said D'Artagnan; "go see the queen and assure her that I will regain that letter if man can extract such a thing from those who know its worth."

"But it is not a letter," said the lady; "I am assured that a pack of fortune-telling cards, with which the queen distracts herself, is alone missing."

"Card or letter, I will return it—if they let me return at all."

To save the queen, and by retaining the king in his changed mood to her was to annul this destructive missive. A queen's rival would not offer to take this step and endanger her darling in the act.

Happily, Anne, who trusted few of her sex, believed in the good faith of this ward. She instructed her and re-

voked the message so that D'Artagnan felt that he had full powers.

But Chalais, even more effectually than the duchess, concealed his tracks. The guardsman lost some time, when he thought to question his groom. Planchet had no acquaintances with the court prominencies, but he knew all the lackeys. He at once had an answer.

"Chalais' valet is in a fret," said he. "Instead of accompanying his master, he has been put on 'board wages' in Rieux House, until the lord's return. So as he fears that his lord will not return and he wishes to join him in exile, from a certain affection for him, he keeps a pointing finger on him."

"He knows where he is?" cried the soldier, delightedly.

"No, but he knows that he is to be at Forges within ten days."

Forges was a watering place at this period, what Vichy was in the following reign. It was convenient for access and flight.

"I am going to Forges, but I must go alone. I hope you will not pine with grief, 'on board wages,' while I am gone."

He went to confer with Lady Sansforain on his departure.

"Your man is right," she agreed; "Lady Combalet has told me that the plot is going on. She says that the Duke of Anjou offers to return to Paris, if the Count of Soissons will guarantee him men and money to usurp the throne."

Soissons, as governor of Paris, had cash and soldiers for such an effort.

“Well, I believe Soissons capable.”

“I believe him incapable personally. But this is the corroboration of your groom’s story: Anjou shilly-shal-lies, alleging that he must await news from Forges before leaving his shelter.”

“Chalais is there.”

He pressed on with such help as was prepared on most roads for a queen’s messenger, and found in the Galen’s Gallipot, at the medicinal springs, a mysterious and noble stranger whom he soon set down as the object of his quest.

Chalais had not received any message from Lady Chevreuse. For the greater precaution, she had sent it so as to reach Laisques direct. Laisques had been spied closely by Count Rochefort, but he could not intercept this communication.

Rochefort had traveled as a monk; he entered the Capuchin Convent, at Brussels, under power of a letter from Father Joseph, opening all the religious houses of Flanders to him. Joseph, too, had recommended a head one, as he knew that the superior was a friend of Austria. Indeed, Laisques came there, where Rochefort had crept in as a foe of the cardinal, who had hunted him out of France.

He acted his part so badly that the marquis was caught. Their friendship came to fruition so that the plotter

begged the poor fugitive to carry a packet to Chalais, called "the French Gentleman," just over the line.

Rochefort demurred, alleging that, though he loved to die on his natal soil, he did not wish to be hasty, and that he might be captured if he conferred with French gentlemen, no doubt fresh from the court.

Laisques persuaded him, and he departed.

On the road he looked into the packet confided to him, not resting assured on what the marquis had certified to him; that it was not an incriminatory document. It was a pack of cards.

Rochefort could not make anything of that, but on being sure that the French gentleman at the Gallipot was Chalais, he went to the mayor and captain of the post, and obtained a force to make an arrest.

He was unable to forecast that D'Artagnan, another French gentleman fresh from Paris, would put up at the Gallipot also.

Hence, with his guards in ambush, he was ushered into the presence of—D'Artagnan!

We have noted that the Gascon, in his *début*, had met with the count, and, in a scuffle, lost a letter of introduction; since, he had tried to meet him in battle, but Rochefort, though brave, was prudent when on duty. The cardinal, he said, would forgive a man everything but getting killed when on duty.

This time, recognizing the supposed Capuchin by the scar face, and aware that he was facing an instrument

of the prime minister's, Louis pocketed his private grievance. He did not want Chalais arrested before he acquired the queen's inculcating message.

"Thunder!" exclaimed Rochefort, rarely embarrassed, but nonplused this time, "is it you in correspondence with——" He stopped, for he saw that D'Artagnan did not expect him or a message from Brussels.

"If your coat means anything, you are a friend of Father Joseph's," said the Gascon, fencing to see how strong was his antagonist.

"We are 'brothers;' you are not another, are you?"

"No, but I am here because of his impulse."

"The deuce you are!"

"Certainly; is not Lord Rieux his penitent——"

"I do not know that Rieux is his penitent, but he is my best friend. Is he in danger of his life that his ghostly father sends you—away from him?"

"No, but he is in danger because he has mixed himself up with Harcourt, Count Candale and others of the Aversionists; and this time they who espoused Anjou will not escape, as they did in the Fleury collapse, saving the two Vendomes. This time the small fry are to be taken in the net and, faith, they will stew a little, till the bones come easily out of the flesh."

Rochefort shuddered at this tolerably ghoulish prospect.

"But Rieux would not look well, merely skin and bones. He is not like Harcourt, who could lose a few pounds and be improved."

“But Rieux must suffer if this plot comes to a head, since that head will be struck off.”

“Rieux is not the man to enter his full length into a plot.”

“If only his head gets in, it will be enough.”

“But Rieux—Chalais——” stammered Rochefort, losing his head by a miracle.

“Rieux has fallen in love, after several examples, with the new Chalais come to court.”

“Oh!” exclaimed the pretended monk, who knew more than was ever held under one cowl except Joseph’s, “that baroness has a string of hearts at her girdle, like Queen Margaret, of Navarre?”

“That is to say, Rieux has written letters to her which she placed with Chalais, her kinsman, for safety. Only, as Chalais chose to hurry to this place, to drink so many glasses of water—very nauseating, and not superior to any well of Paris—between us, he carried the letters with him.”

“If that is all, and they are just love letters, what harm if Chalais is a walking letter bag?”

“Well, a letter is how it is read. Without experience of the high courts, I believe that a slip of paper will send a man to the block as well as the king’s warrant, though simply written in love.”

“I have heard of such blunders. But what makes you think that Chalais, granting he is here——”

“Oh, he is here, in this inn, for I have followed him to house him.”

“Will Chalais be arrested and his bag emptied out?”

“Because I saw from my room that the little post of soldiers and the constables are mustered and come at your heels as far as the wheelwright’s, in whose shed they are concealed to wait for your signal.”

“M. D’Artagnan, you executed the piece of horsemanship most creditable in your life when you rode to town with my lord duke, after his escape from Fleury and Montheureux.”

“Count, the plot was an attempt to ruin your lord because of his great attachment to the king and our country. The cardinal, by your leave, is so hated that his fall will follow our liege’s death. So he reigns by grace of this tolerably ephemeral monarch. He must conserve his life, and I have no other wish.”

“We agree on one point. Let us make a little bargain.”

“For France?”

Rochefort pointed to a water bottle on the sideboard.

“You see that decanter? That is France. There is some good stuff in there, but with that infernal stopper in, no good can come out. Now, that stopper is Chalais. Strike that out, and the good liquor can be diffused for all our benefit. If out of that, then comes peace——”

“That is all I seek. Chalais’ cousin is not bewailing him, only she can have no peace, or your friend, Rieux, either, while in that bottle corked up by Chalais is his love letter or two.”

“In fact, you wish to have an audience with Chalais?”

“Without a file of soldiers by——”

“To prevail on him to give up the terrors?”

“Your perspicuity is such that I fully understand why the cardinal prices you highly.”

“My dear, young sir, you shall see your Chalais, for, I believe you want the letters; only, why still is Rieux in such fear?”

“Bother Rieux. I have crossed swords with him, and I bear him no good will——”

“You have crossed swords with me, but, I trust, you bear me no ill will.”

“It is the lady I would save from the consequences——”

“Oh, la, la!”

“Yes; without her evincing a preference, you will understand that a lady of many lovers, like the Duchess of Chevreuse, for example, is apt, in the complexity, to lose every one, and when one——”

“Ah! there is always a one, true.

“And when one is loved, admired, glorified, et cetera——”

“No more,” interrupted Rochefort, concluding that this pointed to the king being ensnared by the queen’s god-daughter. “I am going to please you, the lady and—one whose name need not be trumpeted here.”

“So I may see Count Chalais without a surrounding of constables and militia?”

“As long as you do not advise him to jump out of a

window or sneak out of the stables-way, proceed. Get the letters. Only, let me quit myself of my mission first."

"I forgot your robe. You are a missionary to the pagan, then?"

"I believe, with you, that Master Chalais will change from the Galen's Pot into the cells of the Bastile, and to lessen the deprivation of his ordinary amusements, I bring him from his friends a volume of the devil's praying books."

"Cards?" cried D'Artagnan, with revived interest.

"Odd in a pious fellow's budget, but it was forced upon me. 'Forced cards,' ha, ha!"

Soldiers in the country and the mayor's posse burn to distinguish themselves; D'Artagnan did not wish those poor fellows to suffer. Hardly had Rochefort, as the Franciscan left Chalais' presence, having delivered his packet, than the other French gentleman from court entered in his turn.

He announced himself as the envoy of his cousin, but, at the mention of Baroness Sansforain, helping Chalais to recall where he had seen this person, all the incidents of the unfortunate night of D'Artagnan's exploit returned clearly.

He stood puzzled by the immediate demand of Anne-Charlotte for the queen's message, that pack of cards which Rochefort had but instantly handed him.

But things were precipitating themselves upon him lately.

To give up this weapon, which might serve him well while aiding the king and cardinal to overthrow the queen, was injurious, but Talleyrand-Chalais was a noble and never did he prove his nobility plainer than thus acting.

But at the moment of his going to return the object, both were startled by a tramp of men in the hall.

D'Artagnan's idea was that Rochefort had broken faith with him; Chalais, that the young guardsman had been gulling him to give time for him to be made prisoner with what dispatches the messenger from Brussels had borne him in his hands.

They both regarded each other suspiciously and both laid a grip on their swords.

The gathering was the landlord and some friends who had learned that the soldiers were coming to arrest one or the other or both the mysterious French gentlemen honoring the Galen with their hazardous patronage; they had begged him to anticipate the act by taking them in hand and so gain profit from the government against which they were leagued.

Already the host saw himself thanked by the prime minister, and possibly the king in person.

Chalais ran to the window, while D'Artagnan, to show that the attack was not fixed by him, barred the door.

But the count saw the armed men coming up the street to the disorganization of the quiet drinkers of the chalybeate waters, who stared as they marched by.

Chalais recognized that he must either fall in a hand-to-hand fight with lowly knaves, or accept the alternative.

But, while he had no choice about the fact, he could alter the head of it.

“Open the door,” said he, and on the door opening and displaying the corridor full of the improvised warriors, he said, loudly :

“Sir Knight of Artagnan,” handing him his sword, “I constitute myself your prisoner.”

The young soldier comprehended how adroit was this ruse. He took the sword and said as loudly :

“Prisoner of the queen’s guards. Lower your weapons and snuff out your firedog matches. Count Chalais is prisoner of the queen.”

Rochefort could not have planned the subterfuge more nicely. Chalais prisoner of the king was painful, since he had been the king’s next man. Prisoner of the cardinal, it was persecution, and one was almost warranted in trying to help him flee on the road ; but Chalais prisoner of the queen was a mock arrest, and who could doubt that he let himself be carried back to town for a sham trial and brilliant acquittal.

So D’Artagnan had this distinguished company on his return, beginning with the force which Rochefort had provided of disbanded veterans, and continuing to press into service from the garrisons, so that he reached Paris with quite a regiment.

Thence the prisoner was conveyed to Nantes, where he was tried.

Contrary to ancient laws, the king appointed a special commission.

The queen, having the pack of cards returned to her by her guardsman, through her ward, breathed the only tranquil breath in the party involved.

Gaston sought to flee, but as everybody was ready to turn state evidence, he resigned himself to useless prayers and cursing. Lady Chevreuse worked hard to procure release, but no man would put himself forward against the king, who had been silent to Lady Sansforain's appeal for her relative, and who had, in the judgment, struck out the plea for commutation of the penalty.

Nevertheless, the king had been heard to say:

"I am very unhappy."

But all hopes were crushed by the culprit himself. Into his cell descended an unidentified person, the gray cardinal or the red one, who brought away a paper signed by the prisoner. It was a complete confession. He admitted his correspondence with Austria, with Spain and with the governor of Paris. But he no longer enveloped the queen in the web; D'Artagnan and Anne-Charlotte had saved her.

Louis turned white at this evidence; he saw that revolt would have led to his ruin; he called the cardinal his sole friend and let him carry out the decree.

Nevertheless, there was promised a delay; two executioners were entitled to perform the last act for a conspirator; the headsman of Nantes and the one from Paris, called the state, or royal deathsman.

Through a blunder, the one retired to the capital to leave his brother to enjoy his prerogative and the one local, understanding that his esteemed colleague of Paris would exercise his privilege, went off on a fishing excursion, which he had promised himself on his first vacation.

At this juncture a tall, dark man, calling himself an old soldier, offered to take their place.

He was not strong looking, but appearances are deceitful; the executioner's sword, though heavy, was a toy to him; he struck, but only cleft the neck without severing it.

"Give me another," said he, "or I will never finish the king's work."

This time he lopped off the head.

He was the last man who exchanged a word with the culprit.

"My man," said Judge Marillac, giving him with his own hand a purse for having relieved authority of the grave dilemma of a condemned man and no executioner, "what did the count say to you?"

"That he no longer regretted this death, since he died foiling the king."

"In what way has he foiled his majesty?"

"Why, his majesty vowed that Chalais should perish degraded by the common hangman, and as it is, he was slain by a gentleman. I am not a soldier, but the Knight of Vouvray!"

"Then why did you lend yourself to this deception?"

“Because the king deprived me of my situation at court and wanted to deprive me, too, of life; but, lo! he is not going even to have that satisfaction.”

And then and there, before the tribunal, he drove a dagger deeply into his breast.

In his dying throes, he farther confessed, but for the king's ear only, that he was the instrument of Father Joseph in introducing the king into the queen's suite to adore Lady Sansforain.

“This is how I am served,” commented Louis, severely. “This discharged servant, whom I doomed, years ago, has actually slipped in and out of the palace——”

“And strewn your majesty's path with horse trippers,” added Richelieu, to account for another offense.

“And I never knew.”

Lady Sansforain made a final appeal on behalf of the family; the remains were allowed to be buried in the ancestral vault.

The cardinal-duke became sovereign-master from that death; royalty, eclipsed at the Henry IV. assassination, burst from the dark only at the rise of Louis XIV.

Prince Gaston was dishonored, and the queen visited him with a contempt which never faded out; but, as it was desirable not to let him contract any foreign alliance, he was married to the heiress of the Montpensiers and elevated into the dukedom of Orleans.

To have to thank the cardinal for this was the gratitude mixed with pain of the dog pelted with marrow bones.

As for our hero, let a line or two of history acquaint us

with the success of his courtship of the Lady Anne-Charlotte.

“By his marriage with the Lady Anne-Charlotte, of Chanlevy, baroness of Sansforain, the lieutenant of royal musketeers, Louis D’Artagnan, had two sons,” etc.

But more pertinently, D’Artagnan, promoted by the queen’s warm returns for his recovering her cards, became sub-lieutenant of her guards, and accompanied that detachment of them figuring at the siege of La Rochelle. His adventures there are chronicled in our work: “The Three Musketeers,” but for later facts we point to our sequel: “D’Artagnan’s Capture; or, the Reign of Richelieu.”

THE END.

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